

VAISHNAVISM

(*A History of the origin and development of the
Vaishnava Religion in India*)

By

Akhoury Basdeo Narayan Sinha,
Hindi and Urdu Translator

*to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, Formerly Editor
of Modern Behar (Patna), Joint Editor of the
daily Beharee (Patna), Senior Sub-Editor
of the Leader (Allahabad)
Author of "Shri Rupkala"
etc etc.*



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ILLUSTRATION

Portrait of Shri SITA RAM, opposite page

PREFACE.

A well-known English daily reviewing my last book suggested the publication of a volume containing the origin and development of the Vaishnava religion. This was some years ago. Enough of official work and still more of domestic worries, however, made it impossible for me to make any systematic effort to get on with the writing. Naturally therefore intervals of business had to be utilized and that is why repetitions may be detected at some places.

An attempt has been made to trace the Vaishnava religion from the Vedas. All available materials have been collected together to prove that the religion existed during the pre-Buddhist, the Buddhist and the post-Buddhist periods. The life and teachings of the principal Vaishnava reformers are given. The radical reforms introduced by Chaitanya in Bengal and Ramanand in the United Provinces and Bihar are thoroughly discussed. An introduction to some Maharashtra saints follows. Some of the living Vaishnava leaders are also described.

It is not claimed that any source hitherto untapped has been tapped, nor is it contended that an original interpretation has been put on any text. The author has only collected together the existing materials and presented them in his own way.

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If the presentation has not been faithful or if the description has not been accurate, the fault is entirely his.

Each chapter begins with a Sanskrit or vernacular quotation. In selecting these an effort has been made to get together popular poems appropriate to the subject-matter of the chapter. An English translation of these is invariably given. In one chapter the text has been left out and only the translation given.

A Vaishnava is a worshipper of the Lord. He requires the assistance of forms to meditate on his Lord. These forms are different with the different schools and are described at the proper places. A three-coloured picture of Shri Sita Ray—the form in which the Lord is popularly worshipped in Bihar and Oudh—is given in the book.

I am grateful to a number of friends who have very kindly assisted me in the collection of materials for the book and I would take this opportunity of thanking each one of them for the assistance so ungrudgingly rendered. I would, however, make a special mention of two of my friends. Babu Braja-behari Sahay, B. A., Preside of the Patna High Court and Babu Deekhinardan Lal, B. A., B. L., of the office of the Hindi and Urdu Translator to the Government of Bihar and Orissa, Patna.

Shri Rupkasa Kutir.
Mithapur, PATNA.
July 22, 1922

A. B. N. Sinha.

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Shri Sita Ram.

Ancient Vaishnavism.

CHAPTER I.

शान्ताकारं भुजगशयनं पद्मनाभं सुरेशं ।
विश्वाधारं गगनसदृशं मेघवर्णं शुभांगं ॥
लक्ष्मीकान्तं कमलनयनं योगविदध्यानगम्यं ।
बन्दे बिष्णु भवभय हरणं सर्वलौकिक नाथम् ॥

Prostrations to Thee—the Lord of lords, the one Master of the entire Universe, the sole Stay of the world, the Dispeller of worldly fears Thee, the Consort of the divine Lakshmi,—on the divine serpent reclining art Thou, the boundless and infinite, the grand and grave, cloud-coloured, lotus-eyed and auspicious-bodied Thou, whom by meditation alone can the Yogi perceive !

The above represents in general the Vaishnava conception of the Lord of the Universe It embodies no physical directory to His abode, it is no topographical account of heaven, it does not pretend to be a guide to the terrestrial explorer. It aims at being a homely hint to the Vaishnava in the meditation of the Lord. The Vaishnava certainly is no idolator, for even in these lines he explicitly asserts that He--the Lord of the Universe--can be perceived by meditation alone and is thus far above all physical environments.

Vaishnavism is no medæval cult, it is not a later day belief. It sprang not from the fortuitous concourse of different religions, of various teachings and of diverse dogmas. It is no adaptation of the

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religion of another clime or another age. It is ancient and perennial—as ancient as the Vedas and as perennial as the Ganges. Time may have widened its scope, age may have broadened its usefulness and lapse of centuries may have changed its form beyond all recognition; but there is no doubt that the Vaishnavism of the Vedas stands to-day as one of the most acceptable of all religious beliefs, a great factor in hushing up ecclesiastical fanaticism and in the propagation of the doctrine of the universality of religion. It may have been a mere speck of cloud no bigger than a man's hand in the Vedic age; but it can fairly be claimed for it that much of the liberalism in the religion of the educated Hindu as opposed to the fanaticism of the followers of some other religions is due to Vaishnavism and its indirect influences.

Back to the Vedas; does not seem to be a reasonable cry in this age of the aeroplane and the wireless; but there is no doubt that of all so far discovered records there is nothing more ancient than the Vedas. Naturally therefore every cult, every belief and every thought must trace itself back to the Vedas if its claim to antiquity is not to be challenged. And Vishnu is often mentioned in the Vedas and is described as “permeating and infusing His essence into material objects.” In one of the well-known hymns of the Rig Veda, Vishnu is described as “striding through the seven regions of the Universe in three steps and enveloping all objects with the dust of his beams.” Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitra

regards this hymn as "the holiest *Mantra* still recited at *Sradddhas* and marriage rites" Similarly several quotations can be given from the Yajur Veda We quote below one *Mantra* --

विष्णोःराटमसि विष्णोः श्रद्धे स्थो विष्णोः स्थूरसि
विष्णोर्ध्रुवोऽसि वैष्णवमसि विष्णवेत्वां ।

Here Vishnu is invoked for the success of the sacrifice And what is the Vedic conception of Vishnu ? He is the creator of the entire Universe pervading and giving light to it Other *Mantras* can be quoted from the Vedas to show that Vishnu was assigned the highest place. We shall refer here only to the *Mantra* in the Rig Veda containing the words *विष्णो परमं पदम्* Some scholars are of opinion that this *Parama-pada* of Vishnu is, in all probability, the position of the sun in the zenith. Vishnu of the Vedas has, according to this view, been regarded as a solar deity, occupying the highest heaven, and capable of pervading with his light and life all the three worlds making up the visible Universe, the earth-world, the mind-world and the sky-world The highest among the Gods and the all-pervading God—such evidently is the conception underlying Vishnu in the Vedas There is yet another conception of Vishnu which deserves to be carefully noted. In the *Mantra* below *प्रतद्विष्णुस्तंवते बीज्येण मृगो न भीम कुचरो निष्ठिा* । Vishnu is described as punishing and admonishing wild beasts which prey upon innocent lives The Vedic Vishnu was not only the giver of light and energy but also the destroyer of evil beings in

order to make this Universe more fitted for good beings to live in. Bhaga is another name by which Vishnu was known to the Vedas.

Another independent authority is the celebrated grammarian Panini. In one of his Sutras the word Vasudeva is used. Commenting on this Patanjali distinctly states that the Vasudeva referred to therein is the name of the worshipful or of one who is preeminently worshipful such as God. Panini is said to have flourished at least four centuries before Christ. Again the various religious systems and superstitions prevailing in the fourth century before Christ are given in the following passage occurring in the Niddesa:—"The deity of the lay followers of the Ajivakas is the Ajivakas, of those of the Nighanthas is the Nighanthas, of those of the Jatilas is the Jatilas, of those of the Paribhajakas is the Paribhajakas, of those of the Avaruddhakas is the Avaruddhakas, and the deity of those who are devoted to an elephant, a horse, a cow, a dog, a crow, Vasudeva, Baladeva, Punnabhadda, Manibhadda, Aggi, Nagas, Supannas, Yakkas, Asuras, Gandhabbas, Maharajas, Chanda, Suriya, Indra, Brahma: Deva, Disa is the elephant, the horse, the cow, the dog, the crow, Vasudeva, Baladeva, Punnabhaddo, Manibhaddo, etc., respectively". The extract is from a book which though in the nature of a commentary is regarded as one of the books of the Pali Buddhist canon. It is not certainly surprising that this Buddhist commentator placed the worshipers of Vasudeva on the same level with those of fire, sun, moon, Brahma

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and even of elephants, dogs, crows, etc. Even to-day Vaishnavism is as little understood by the followers of other religious beliefs as it was during the time of the commentator of the 4th century B. C. But Vaishnavism was a recognised religion even at the time Buddhism was the accepted religion of the majority in India.

Another unimpeachable authority Megasthenes states that Vasudeva Krishna was specially worshipped by Surasenas—an Indian clan—in whose land are two great cities, Methora and Kleisobora and through which flows the navigable river Jobares. Methora is the modern Muttia and Jobares is Jumna. Certainly then if the Vasudeva Krishna worship prevailed in the time of the first Maurya it must have originated long before the establishment of the Maurya dynasty and before the rise of Buddhism. It is on record that Buddhism in its early years carried every thing in its own way and the only possibility that this fact points to is that Vaishnavism was founded and had become an established religious belief long before Buddhism eclipsed the religious horizon of India. Referring to the Besnagar inscription in which Heliodora represents himself to have erected a Garudadhwaja or a column with the image of Garuda at the top in honour of Vasudeva, the God of gods, Sir R. G. Bhandarkar remarks —“Heliodora calls himself a Bhagwata, was the son of Diya, was a native of Taksasila and is spoken of as an ambassador of the Yavana and as such came on a political mission from

Antalika to Bhagabhadra who must have ruled over Eastern Malwa. In this inscription occurs the name Antalika which is in all likelihood the same as Antialkidas of the Bactro-Greek coins. This name as well as the form of the characters show that it belongs to the earlier part of the second century before Christian era. At that time Vasudeva was worshipped as the God of gods and his worshippers were called Bhagwatas. The Bhagwata religion prevailed in the north-western part of India and was adopted even by the Greeks. In the second century before the Christian era therefore Vaishnavism was a recognised institution. Another important fact that should be noted is that it was a proselytizing religion admitting within its fold not only men of different faiths but also foreigners.

Let us now turn to Valmiki. According to Professor Monier Williams, the Ramayana of this first Sanskrit poet was originally composed about 500 B C. This epic poem consisting of about 24,000 stanzas, arranged in seven books, relates the story of Sri Ramachandra and his spouse Shri Sita. A perusal of this masterpiece of Valmiki is enough to convince anyone that the hero of this poem is not merely the son of Maharaja Dasratha, not merely an ideal householder and an adorable sovereign, these he undoubtedly is, but he is also an incarnation of the Lord—the Lord himself in human flesh and blood. Another fact that deserves prominence in this connection is that like Vishnu, Vasudeva and Narayan, Ram also, as a name of the Lord, must have been

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well known to the people of India before the commencement of the Christian era. It is, however, not possible to scrap together anything more than mere fragmentary evidence in support of this theory inasmuch as the official chroniclers of the time were mainly Buddhists, who could not naturally be expected to be partial to Vaishnavism.

Turning to another equally important epic, the Mahabharata, probably by far the biggest epic poem that the world has ever produced, we find ample evidence of the prevalence of Vaishnavism in pre-Buddhist period. It is called an *Itihas* or sacred history, but is really a collection of *Itihases*—a vast cyclopædia or thesaurus of Hindu traditions, legendary, history, ethic and philosophy which afterwards become the source of many of the Purans. The entire work consists of about 2,20,000 lines divided into eighteen books called *Paras*. These are *Adi*, *Sabha*, *Vana*, *Virata*, *Udyoga*, *Bhishma*, *Drona*, *Karna*, *Salya*, *Sanptika*, *Stri*, *Santi*, *Anusasana*, *Asvamedhika*, *Asramavasika*, *Mausala*, *Mahaprasthanika* and *Svaigarohanika*. Throughout this work are frequent references to Vishnu and Vaishnavism and Bhagwat and Bhakti. Krishna is often referred to as the incarnation of the Lord, yea the Lord himself taking birth for upholding righteousness and punishing the wrongdoer. According to Professor Monier Williams, the Mahabharata was composed about 500 B. C. Both in this work as well as in the Ramayana there are internal and external evidences to show that they must have been composed before

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the rise of Buddhism in India ; but it would obviously be impossible in a book of this nature to discuss these. I shall therefore for the present take for granted the dates given by well-known oriental scholars, who cannot be accused of any partiality for Vaishnavism.

According to so eminent a scholar as Sir R. G. Bhandarkar Vishnavism appeared first about the fifth century before Christ as a religious reform like Buddhism and Jainism, but based on theistic principles. Its early name was *Ekantik Dharma*, or the religion of a simple-minded love and devotion to one. In its background stood the Bhagwada Gita, a discourse given by Lord Krishna on the eve of the war of Kurukshetra. If we admit that the Mahabharata and the Ramayana were composed about 500 B C, we will have to admit that Vaishnavism must have existed for centuries before, as the religion referred to in these works appear neither to have emanated with them nor to have been propagated by them. It is abundantly evident that Vaishnavism must have been a well-developed and well-established religion at the time the two great epics were first composed. Valmiki merely rendered into verse what must have been known to the people from before, for no great poet has so far sung of characters unknown to his race. Similarly in the Bhagwada Gita the three paths of *Bhakti*, *Gyan* and *Karma* are described at some length. The conception of Bhagwat as the supreme Being to whom ultimately all *Jivas* have to go must have been familiar before there could be

talk of the ways and means of attaining to that
 Bhagwat In Valmiki there is not the least allusion
 to Buddhism—a fact which would have been impos-
 sible if that religion had been in existence or had
 attained to the position of a state religion Besides
 Megasthenes with his great partiality for Buddhism
 would not have gone out of his way to mention this
 religion as being professed by people of a certain part
 of the country The only evidence about the existence
 of Buddhism is alleged to have been found in the
Mahabharata where the ten incarnations of Vishnu
are mentioned. Personally I have grave doubts as
 to whether some of these incarnations are not inter-
 pollations. I have never been able to reconcile
 myself to a belief in the ten incarnations In the
 Santiparva Narad is reported to mention only six
 incarnations of the Lord. These are—(1) Varaha,
 (2) Narasimha, (3) Vaman, (4) Parasu Ram, (5) Ram
 and (6) Krishna At any rate even assuming that
 Buddha is also mentioned in the Mahabharata as an
Avatar, can it possibly be true that during the first
 four or five centuries of Buddhism when it carried
 on such an ecclesiastical warfare against Hinduism,
 when Vaishnavas were regarded as no better than
 the worshippers of dogs and crows, any Vaishnava
 book of recognised authority would have elevated
 the very person who kicked at Vaishnavism to the
 exalted position of an incarnation. It would have
 been more natural to have compared such a personage
 with Ravana or Kansa If human nature in those
 days was not very different from what it is now,

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surely no Vaishnava could have given that honour to the founder of the faith whose adherents reviled Vaishnavism. Therefore the theory about Buddha being an incarnation was possibly put in by some subsequent writer by way of consolation at the time Buddhism had ceased to have any considerable following in this country. It would be uncharitable to suppose that the interpolation was the work of some Buddhist scholar. Any way if we leave out this reference to Buddhism, there is nothing else in the Mahabharata to denote that it was composed during the time of the early Buddhists. On the other hand there is enough evidence to justify the conclusion that Mahabharata or at any rate the greater portion of it was composed before Buddhism was founded and that therefore Vaishnavism was a recognised religion of no mean repute before Buddha was born.



Later Vaishnavism.

CHAPTER II.

यज्ञेशं यज्ञपुरुषं यज्ञपालनतत्परं ।

The God of *Yajna*, the Lord of *Yajna*, ever ready to protect *Yajna*

With these words was Lord Vishnu invoked in the post-Vedic age. The most important ceremonial was the *Yajna* or sacrifice and Vishnu was not only the Lord of sacrifice but also the protector in its performance. It was with this object that the sage Vishwamitra took away Shri Ramchandra from Ajodhya.

Even during the time when the history of India is practically the history of Buddhism, Vaishnavism did exist and continue to be the belief of millions in this country. Having discussed the evidence in regard to the existence of Vaishnavism in the Vedic and subsequent periods prior to the commencement of the Christian era, we shall now refer to the available evidence in respect of the early centuries after the commencement of the Christian era. These evidences may roughly speaking be divided into three classes — (1) coins, (2) inscriptions on stones or metals, and (3) contemporary books. We find that the coins of the Gupta monarchs, specially of Chandra Gupta II, Kumar Gupta and Skanda Gupta contain the words *Parma Bhagvata*. Now a *Parma Bhagvata* is an

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ardent worshipper of *Bhagwad* or the Lord Vishnu. The Guptas are said to have flourished about the fourth and fifth century after Christ. Then comes therefore clearly show that Vaishnavism was the accepted religion of the court in those days and that it was with a sense of pride that the Gupta kings proclaimed their following of the Vaishnava religion.

At Udayagiri there is the figure of a God with four arms mounted on a panel. The date of the inscription is given as 400 A.D. This figure is evidently that of Vishnu. It is difficult to say what the panel represents. Udayagiri is a place where Buddhism had made considerable headway. Does this panel, then, represent the reconversion of the people from Buddhism to Vaishnavism? Or, is it merely the symbol of the sovereignty of a certain Vaishnava king over that area? | At any rate this much is certain that the panel with the figure at the top is an evidence of the wide-spread influence of Vaishnavism in 400 A.D. | At Bhitari in the district of Ghazipur in the United Provinces there was discovered a few decades ago a pillar containing a long inscription. This inscription records the grant of a village for worship of Krishna installed in a temple in that village. The grantor is King Skanda Gupta and the date of the grant is 460 A.D. It is clear that this was not the only village whose income was, by a royal mandate, dedicated to a temple. Again it is well-known that Chakrapalita as Viceroy of Katinawar erected a temple of Vishnu in 456 A.D. That takes us practically to the other end of India

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and proves that Vaishnavism even in those days had a following in the Bombay presidency. Long before Ram Das delivered his inspiring message to Shivaji, long before Juneswar composed his *Abhangs* and long before Ekanath sang of the ninefold path of *Bhakti*, the Bombay presidency already knew of Vishnu and worshipped Him in one or other of His manifestations. Even in the metropolis of modern India, and the capital of the great Moghuls, Delhi, there is an iron pillar near the Kutub Minar. The inscription on it refers to it as the flag staff of Vishnu erected by a great king of the name of Chandra, who enjoyed universal sovereignty and was a great devotee of Vishnu. The inscription bears no date. But judging from the description given in the inscription, as also from the language employed and other external evidence available, it would not be wrong to suppose that the reference is to a king of the Gupta dynasty, Chandra Gupta II, by name. If this presumption is correct, the pillar was erected sometime about the end of the fourth century or the beginning of the fifth century A D. These inscriptions, meagre though in number, prove conclusively that Vaishnavism was a very widely followed religion in the fourth and fifth centuries. It is not the purpose of the writer to enumerate all the inscriptions hitherto discovered on the subject. Those in quest of these would do well to refer to the original sources. Suffice it to say that sculptural traces of the existence of Vaishnavism have been found in different parts of India, right up to the

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ninth century after which we have something more substantial to construct our narratives upon

Turning now to the third class of evidence it may be noted that Kalidas in his *Meghdutta* has frequently referred to Vishnu. The history of the family of Shri Ramchandra is to be found in another equally well-known book by the same author. The poet commences canto X of *Raghuvansam* with an invocation to Lord Vishnu or Narayan reposing on the great serpent with the Divine Lakshmi champooing his legs in the milky ocean and the Lord's promise to be born as a son to Maharaja Dasratha for the destruction of the demon Ravana. Now this poet flourished during the time of the great Vikramaditya, the name of whose court have almost passed into a proverb. It is difficult to say which Vikramaditya it was. If it was the one after whom the Samvat era is named, we shall go back to a period before Christ. But Sir R. G. Bhandarkar is of opinion that Kalidas flourished during the reign of Chandra Gupta II or about 460 A. D. Another book, the *Vayu Purana*, believed to have been written about the fifth century before Christ refers to Shri Ram as an incarnation of Vishnu. There is thus no doubt that Vaishnavism never ceased to have an existence and a following even when Buddhism had succeeded in partially monopolizing the whole of India. On the other hand there is evidence to show that with the growth of Buddhism, the enthusiasm of *Bhagvatas* went up considerably and the A. wars at any rate are found to

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be making a passionate display of religion about the time Buddhism was at its highest. It is not possible to give the exact period when the Alvars flourished. It is claimed by some that they represent a period between 4203 B.C. and 2706 B.C. These dates have been discarded by competent authorities as fanciful and it is asserted that they flourished after the birth of Christ. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that the Alvar songs are the earliest of which we have any record. The influence of these writers on Tamil literature is admitted. From the early years of the Christian era Vaishnavism flourished under the strong impetus given by the Alvars, who by their Tamil *Bhajans* inculcated *Bhakti*. These saints belonged to various castes and were unique in their devotion to God, leading a life of remarkable religious fervour and strong indifference to worldly pleasures. The Alvars speak with respect of the Vedas but their chief teachings are three, namely (1) recitation of the Lord's name, (2) service at the temples, and (3) contemplation of the personal forms of the Lord. They laid stress on the doctrine of *Bhakti* as a means to the attainment of salvation. The Alvars are twelve in number — (1) Poygai, (2) Bhutattai, (3) Pey, (4) Tirumalisai, (5) Namma, (6) Madhurai Kari, (7) Kulasakhaia, (8) Periy, (9) Andal, (10) Tondaradippodi, (11) Tiruppan, and (12) Thumangai. The most revered of these is Namma or Satakopa. It may be mentioned that Kailasekara's favourite deity was Shri Ramchandra, while the rest worshipped the Lord as Narayan, Vaman or Shri

Krishna The *Prabandhas* or devotional songs of the Alvars occupy the same place among the Tamil speaking Vaishnavas as the Tulsi Ramayana and the Nabha Bhaktmal do among the Hindi-knowing Vaishnavas.

The Alvars were the earliest missionaries to the south. They propagated, as we have seen, the devotional aspect of the Vedanta in the Tamil land and used the language of the people with great effect. The literature of the Alvars presupposes a thorough knowledge of the Krishna and Ram stories, as well as the stories of some of the earlier incarnations of Vishnu and the frequent impassioned references to such stories even in the songs of the earliest Alvars show that the south at any rate must have been flooded with these marvellous legends at a very early period. The story goes that Nathamuni while worshipping at the Vishnu temple of his native village heard some Brahmans from the southern end of India recite Tamil verses of Satakopa addressed to Vishnu and was charmed with their sense and diction. He also found that these verses generally ended thus — "These ten out of the thousand composed by Satakopa." Nathamuni thus played an important part in the research, secreted in the temple, and introduced the whole of Satakopa's works into the Tamil literature. He arranged them along with the other Alvars' works into four collections of about a thousand stanzas each. It must be said to the credit of Nathamuni that he introduced the system of regular recitation of these texts during the festivals at Srirangam and it is said

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that the system obtains even to this day in most ancient temples dedicated to Vishnu

The next group that followed in unbroken succession is known as the Acharyas (or preceptors). This orthodox succession of apostles include six names before Ramanuja of which the two most important are Nathamuni and his grandson Alavandar. The great grandson of this latter through one of his grand daughters was Ramanuja

Ranganathachariya, more usually called Nathamuni or the sage Natha died about 920 A D. He was descended from a family of early Vaishnava immigrants from the banks of the Jamuna and other parts of northern India, who carried the *Bhagwata* or *Pancharatra* cult to the south and laid the foundation for the spread of Vaishnavism in Madras during the second to the seventh centuries of the Christian era which were the palmy days of the Pallava rule. Nathamuni's great contribution to the spread of Vaishnavism was furnished by his introduction and recognition of Tamil as the language of prayer to God in the greatest Vaishnava temples. In that respect he was the fore-runner of the Vaishnavite reformers of northern India. Prayer to be effective must proceed from the heart; and this cannot certainly be possible if the devotee recites *Slohas* without understanding their meaning. If religion is intended for the masses and not for the learned few, prayers must be conducted in the language of the people. Sanskrit had long ceased to be the spoken language of the people; but the conservative priest-

hood insisted on retaining the language for all rituals and worship. The Alvars were the first to throw off the yoke of the priesthood and though their songs had become very popular, Tamil had not been recognised as the language to be used by priests in big temples. It was left to Nathamuni to inaugurate this change. It is not possible to ascertain whether Nathamuni was a complete follower of all the doctrines that now go by the name of Ramanuja School, but as he is traditionally considered the founder of that school, it is to be presumed that he was. At any rate there is ample evidence to show that his grandson Yamunacharya really laid the foundation for all the doctrines that now go under Ramanuja's name. In accordance with the custom of the times Nathamuni went on a pilgrimage to Badrinath, Dwarka and Jagannath. While at Muttra a grandson was born and was named by him Yamuna —after the name of the well-known river there. This was in 916 A.D. The story of the manner of Nathamuni's death is worthy of the ardent devotee that he was. One day a party of huntsmen headed by the Chola king rode past the residence of the sage, who interrupted in his meditations by the attendant bustle, opened his eyes and construing the party to be the divine Rama and his brother, on whom his thoughts were wholly bent in meditation, followed the track of the party and walked with weary steps up to the very gates of the Chola capital and there dropped down dead through sheer fatigue.

While yet a student, Yamuna made a name for

himself as a great scholar. His teacher who was a Doctor of Grammar used to pay an yearly tribute to one Akki Alwar, the court Pandit of the Chola king. The collector of the tribute once came to the school when the teacher was away and young Yamuna in a spirit of bravado replied that no tribute would henceforth be given. The enraged Akki sent a challenge to the teacher to stand a contest of disputation. Yamuna quieted his trembling teacher, who was all for submission to the court Pandit by composing and sending the following spirited verse to the Pandit —

न वयं कव्यस्तु केवल न वयं केवल तन्त्रपारगाः ।
अपितु प्रति वादिवारण प्रकटादो पविपादन क्षमाः ॥

Yamuna was duly escorted to the royal presence and took the place assigned to him. A Vedantic disputation then commenced in which Yamuna gained a complete victory and Akki had to accept a public defeat. The gracious Chola Queen in great pleasure hailed Yamuna as 'Alavandar' (meaning in Tamil, the victor), while the King granted him a portion of his territories to rule and enjoy. Yamuna next entered upon a householder's life and had four sons by his wife. At last the awakening came. He became a Sanyasi, pledged to a wholly spiritual life. He took up his residence at Srirangam and composed philosophical works and expounded the doctrine of Visistadwaitic School. In his time Srirangam became a stronghold of Vaishnavism. Worship at the temple and participation in the regular services both

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in and out of the temple precincts furnished occupation for a large number of the ardent devotees, while the lectures of Alavandar and the frequent discussions held in his presence gave great impetus to Sanskrit study in general and that of the Upanishads and the Sutras in particular. The Upanishads, the Gita and Vedānta Sutras, had long before this established their claim to pre-eminence in Hindu philosophy and had been styled 'the three *Prasthānas*' or primary works on philosophy. Every offshoot of Hinduism from the time of Sankara downwards based its main doctrines on its own interpretations of these three important works: and the pioneers of Vaisṭadwaitism naturally turned their energies towards the task of textual interpretation of the same three works. In Yamuna's time the work of oral interpretation was proceeded with while the formal composition of text books on the subject was reserved for the next generation under the guidance of Ramanuja. The personal life of Yamunacharya at Srirangam was simple and without any stirring incidents. One trip which Yamuna undertook, late in his life, was to Conjeevaram, whither he went to see the rising young scholar Ramanuja. Yamuna was accompanied by his Sudra pupil Kanchipurna, who has since become canonised and has at present a special idol and shrine erected in his honour in the modern town of small Canjeevaram. Yamuna lived to a good o'd age and is said to have died about 1040 A D.

The Vaishnava Religion.

CHAPTER III.

In the beginning there was neither nought nor aught.

Then there was neither sky nor

atmosphere above

What then enshrouded all this teeming universe ?

In the receptacle of what was it contained ?

Was it enveloped in the gulf profound of water ?

Then there was neither death nor immortality,

Then there was neither day nor night nor light

nor darkness,

Only the Existent One breathed calmly,

self-contained.

Nought else but He there was--naught else above.

beyond.

Then first came darkness hid in darkness,

gloom in gloom ;

Next all was water, all a chaos indiscrete.

In which the One lay void, shrouded in

nothingness

Then turning inwards, He by self-developed force

Of inner fervour and intense abstraction grew.

First in His mind was formed Desire, the primal germ

Productive, which the Wise, profoundly

searching, say,

Is the first subtle bond, connecting Entity

With Nullity. _____

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The above is the translation of a hymn (Mandala X, 129) of the Rig Veda by Sir Monier-Williams and sets out the origin of the creation as understood by the Aryans of old. In this hymn the Existent One is Vishnu and the Desire is Lakshmi. We perceive here the first outline of the remarkable idea that the Creator willed to produce the Universe through the agency and co-operation of a female principle—an idea which has now acquired a definite shape in the worship of Shri Sita Ram, Radha Krishna, Lakshmi Narayan, etc. We have already seen how the Veda assigned the highest place among the Gods to Vishnu. He had two attributes—(1) that of giving life and light to the Universe, and (2) that of preserving it. At the dawn of the world, we can quite believe that the two problems that confronted the living beings were how to live and how to have more energy and light—physical and mental. That is why to the Vedic Vaishnavas only the above two attributes appealed as absolutely necessary. The worship during the Vedic period consisted of *Mantra* and *Yajna*. Recitation of *richas* from the Vedas and the performance of *homa* were the two necessary things for worship. But there is a difference in the form of the prayers offered in the Vedic times and those offered subsequently. The worshipper prayed for wisdom and strength, for the light of heaven and for such assistance as might make a person daring and optimistic. With the modern Vaishnava the prayer is for the work being done by the Lord himself. In the first case the worshipper was anxious to accomp-

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lish the work himself and in the latter the devotee wants his Lord to do it for him. The Vedic sacrifices consisted mainly of *homa* which later seemed to have degenerated into a regular slaughter of animals and even of men. There is yet another attribute of Vishnu noticed in the Vedas. This is the punishment of evil-doers.

During the post-Vedic period Vaishnavism developed into *Ekantic Dharma* or the religion of a single minded love and devotion to the One. When Narad enquired of the Lord what this religion was, the Lord replied :—"I am one, absolutely one without a second. I am the supreme soul—the internal soul of all souls. I am the supreme creator. All living beings are represented by Samskarsana, who is a form of Mine. From Samskarsana sprang the mind and self-consciousness. All these four are my forms. I create the Gods, men, etc, and all these ultimately find their final dissolution into Me". To Narad's query how to realise this *dharma*, the Lord replies — "Those who are devoted to Me, enter into Me and are released from the bondage of births and deaths".

In the Santiparva of the Mahabharata is related a story which goes to show how even at that early period very great importance was attached to the devotional worship of the Lord. Once upon a time Narad went to Badarikasrama to see Narayan and finding him engaged in the performance of religious rites, enquired as to whom did He, the supreme Lord of the Universe, worship. Narayan's reply was that he worshipped His original form. Narad fled into the

sky and in his attempt to see this original form alighted upon the peak of Meru. There he saw white men without senses, not eating anything, sinless and devoted to Bhagwat. Yudhishtra asked Bhisma who those people were and how they came to be what they were. Bhisma replied:— There was a king named Vasu Uparicara who worshipped the Lord according to the prescribed rituals. He was a glorious king devoted to truth and was holy and honoured by Indra. He was the disciple of Brihaspati and learned in the Shashtras. At one time he brought forward an extensive horse sacrifice, though no animal was killed on the occasion. The oblations were devised in accordance with the words of the Aranyakas. The Lord of all lords showed Himself to Vasu and accepted his oblation, but was unseen by anybody else. Since the oblation was taken away by the Lord without Brihaspati having a look at Him, the former got angry and dashed upwards the sacrificial ladle. Some of the *rishis* present at the sacrifice expressed their opinion that the great Lord was not to be seen by anyone at random, but by one who was favoured by His grace. In support of this three of the *rishis* related a story which is thus set down by the Sir R G Bhandarkar:— “One occasion we went to the north for the attainment of eternal bliss near the milky ocean and practised austerities for four thousand years and at the end a voice in the air declared. ‘Well, how can you see that great Lord? In the milky ocean there is a white island where there are men possessing the lustre of the moon, who

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are devotees of the Lord, possess no senses, do not eat anything and being devoted solely to Him are absorbed in Him, who is bright like the Sun Go to that island ; there shines my soul' Accordingly we went to the White Island and dazzled by the light of that Being were not able to see Him. Then the truth flashed upon us that the Lord cannot be seen by us unless we have gone through austerities After further austerities for a hundred years we saw the men of the lustre of the moon with their minds fully absorbed in the contemplation of the Lord. The refulgence of each man was like that of the sun on the last day Then we heard a sound. '*Jitam te Pundarikaksa,*' etc (Triumphant art Thou. lotus-eyed one) A short time after a voice in the air declared : 'Go you away as you came. That great Being is not to be seen by anyone who is not devoted to Him' Then we returned without being able to see Him" In the Santiparva the story of Narad's visit to Svetadvipa is thus continued. Narad sings about the Lord, uttering names expressive of His purity and grandeur. The Lord manifests Himself to him saying that He was not to be seen by one who was not devoted solely to Him and that as Narad was such a one He showed Himself to him. In this story from the Santiparva there are four important points that deserve to be noticed These are:—(1) A Vaishnava did not kill any animal at his sacrifices ; (2) the oblations were devised in accordance with the teachings of the Aranyakas which include the Upanishads, (3) there is only one Lord who is the Lord of all lords.

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and (4) this Lord is not to be seen by one who follows the sacrificial mode of worship, such as Brihaspati did, nor by persons who practise austerities for thousands of years such as did the three *rishis* in the above story, but by one who worships with devotion. Here then is the broad difference between Vaishnavism on the one hand and Buddhism and Jainism on the other. The repudiation of the slaughter of animals and the inefficacy of sacrificial worship and austerities are common to the three religions. But that the supreme Lord is to be worshipped with devotion and can and does manifest Himself only to His devotees are doctrines which are peculiar to Vaishnavism,

It will thus be seen that even in those early times when Christianity had not even been heard of in India, when the founder of Islam had not even been born, this great doctrine of devotion to the Lord was a well-recognised principle of the Vaishnava religion. Even to-day when there is no dearth of religions and religious preachers claiming superiority for their respective religions, this characteristic trait of Vaishnavism gives to it a distinct position of vantage over all the rest. Not by riches, not by powers, not by sufferings and sacrifices and not by rites and ceremonies can the great Lord of the Universe be seen. There is only one key to this and that is devotion, which is supplied by Vaishnavism. It is not necessary to undergo a certain ceremony in a Church; it is needless to believe in any particular individual as the prophet of the Lord; you need not rush to a jungle to meditate under a tree; your veneration for animal

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life should not stop you from bathing: all that is necessary for you is to be devoted to the Lord,—by whatever name you may call Him. This is Vaishnavism of the fifth century before the birth of Christ and this is the Vaishnavism of to-day as well

This *Ekantika Dharma* as revealed by Narayan is represented to be the same as that which was later communicated to Arjun on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. At the creation of each Brahma it is revealed by Narayan himself and then at the end it is lost. The narration proceeds till we come to the present or the seventh Brahma. In this it was first revealed to Pitamaha and from him it passed in succession to Daksha, his grandson, the eldest Aditya, Vivasvat, Manu and Ikshvaku. We find it stated explicitly that this is "the original great eternal Dharma, difficult to be realised and to be followed".

About the 5th century before Christ it had assumed a different form and was known as *Pancharatra* or Bhagwat religion. According to Megasthenes, this religion was professed by the Satvata tribe of Kshatriyas about the end of the fourth century before Christ. At about this time special importance was attached to the emotional side of Vaishnavism and Shri Krishna and the Gopis, Shri Rama and the Mithila maids wonderfully attracted the minds of the masses and left a lasting impression on the religion itself. From philosophic dissertations so common to a religion, Vaishnavism had passed to the stage of a living religion appealing to the people more by its tears and sobs, laughter and mirth than

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by the soundness of its logic or the force of its philosophy. Eternal truths are one whether they are preached on the fertile plains of India or in the arid deserts of Arabia, whether they emanate from Jerusalem or from under the Bodhi tree. What distinguishes one religion from another is not so much its truths as its dogmas. The Vaishnavas of the early pre-Christ age realised this and therefore laid greater stress on the realization of religion than on its philosophy. That is how a personal God came in—a God taking part in our joys and sorrows, in our sports and festivals, in short a God who like any of His creatures had lived in the world toiling as any of us do. That evidently is the genesis of the incarnations of God.

It must be said to the credit of the Alvars that they were the first to bring down religion from its high level and spread it among the masses. Sanskrit had ceased to be the language of the masses while sacrifices were not within the easy reach of the poor. The Alvars therefore composed and popularised simple Tamil songs preaching love of the Lord. One Alvar sang of Mithila sweet with its sweeter maidens. Some sang of dear Radha and one of the *Vaman* form of the Lord. The whole of the Tamil land began soon to overflow with the music of the Lord, which had penetrated into every nook and corner. But it was not till the time of Nathamuni that the Tamil *abhāṅgas* received a formal recognition for being recited in the great Vaishnava temples of Southern India.

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Later on when Buddhism had begun to disappear and the Brahmans were anxious to convert all Buddhists to their faith, they made Hinduism all-tolerant, all-compliant, all-comprehensive and all-absorbing. The Vaishnava school, instead of starting with a daring new philosophy collected the forces of conservatism by accentuating a life of purity and high morality and gave the deathblow to sacrificialism which had outgrown its original purpose and begun to deny God, while the monism of Sankara won the sympathy of the intellectual among the community by its all-embracing subtlety and covert denunciation of mere Karma and Vedic ceremonial under the guise of the doctrine of illusion. It is difficult to say from the evidence so far available whether the subordinate place assigned to *Karmalanda* was the result of an unconscious adjustment to the state of things that had been created by the sustained attack of Buddhism on the sacrificial system generally or whether the original founders of the Advaitic and Vasīṣṭhadvaitic schools perceived the philosophical absurdity of inculcating the worship of the forces of nature simultaneously with the doctrine of '*Ekam eva advītyam*'. Now Vaishnavism enjoined upon its votaries not to worship any deity but the great God Viṣṇu of the Vedas or Narayan of the Upanishads or any of the incarnations of the Lord. Another restriction that was placed on the worshipper at this time was that there should be no prayer for worldly benefits.

Another notable feature of the Vaishnavism of

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the time that should be noticed is the rapid conversion of a large number of people, some of whom were neither Hindus nor residents of India, to Vaishnavism. While the Brahmans strove to brand non-Aryans as 'dasyus' or thieves and kept them at a distance, the Brahmanism of post-Buddhist period improved upon this by making a monopoly of religious instruction and keeping Sudras and the lower order generally outside its pale. The Smritis have prescribed choice punishment for the Sudra who broke this rule or even listened to a Vedic text while being chanted. In the face of this strict monopoly it must be said to the credit of Vaishnavism that it opened wide its doors to all seekers after God and enjoined upon its votaries not to distinguish between one caste and another. Some of the Alvars were Sudras. Yamunaacharya had a Sudra disciple.

The Acharyas who followed the Alvars represent a different phase of development. While the Alvars symbolised the emotional side, the Acharyas stood for the intellectual. A construction of philosophy which could be placed before the best intellects and which at the same time gave room for the absorption of the teachings of the Alvars and the doctrine of *Bhakti* was the chief feature of this order. The Acharyas may be compared to the Christian Puritans. Ramanuja represented the climax of these teachings and in him we find the philosopher and the devotee combined. The philosophy is as healthy and sympathetic as the devotion is free from irrational worship. It has been said that Ramanuja was un-

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compromising in denying the privilege of the study of the Vedas to Sudra and woman and the latter were never permitted to assume the character of nuns. To understand this position fully, we have to take into account the period when these restrictions were imposed. Ramanuja was anxious for the purity and exemplary character of the lives of the Vaishnava teachers. He was anxious that there should not be even a shadow of suspicion against the Acharyas. As puritan as he was he believed that the admission of women into the religious order might give rise to some immorality. He had seen some of the commentaries on the Vedas and he believed that those commentaries were strong enough to entice away any women to the evil path. It had become a fashion in those days to recite the Vedas and give to the hymns a meaning implying sensuality of a low order. Ramanuja in his anxiety to guard the Indian womanhood from listening to these preposterous interpretations interdicted their study altogether. Similarly he denied this privilege to the Sudras, as he did not like non-Aryans to know that our most sacred book could be so read as to become worse than the worst novel. Except on the above supposition, it would be difficult to justify this action of Ramanuja: Even among the Acharyas, Nathmuni paid due reverence to the Sudra Alwars, while Yamuna—the great grand-father of Ramanuja, and one who is said to have laid the foundation for Ramanuja's philosophy—had a Sudra disciple. Ramanuja himself at least in his younger days was not such a staunch believer in

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caste system, as is known to all those who have read the story of his separation from his wife. Andal, daughter of Vishnuchitta, was a lady devotee.

Why then did Ramanuja impose these restrictions? The answer to our mind is obvious. He chalked out two paths for salvation, one through *Bhakti* which could be followed by anyone irrespective of caste or sex, and another through knowledge. This latter was not to be followed by Sudras and women. Here Ramanuja appears to have shown due regard to the views of the Brahmans and the Shastras. Ramanuja's cult had a very large following during his century and for about two centuries later. About the beginning of the 15th century there was a general protest against his doctrine from the whole of India. In the South Mahamuni Manavala lala emphasis on the spiritual equality of the Brahman and the Sudra *Bhakta*. In the North Ramanand led the way and was followed by several reformers in the different provinces of northern India.

The recitation of the Lord's name accompanied by songs and demonstrations that were introduced by the Alvars ceased to be in favour during the time of Ramanuja. The grace of the Lord was compared to the act of the monkey. Thus while the mother monkey jumped from tree to tree, the young monkey remained firmly attached to her. The other school that developed later believed that God's grace acted like the cat whose young one did nothing and the mother cat had to lift up the kitten and take it from place to place. Another doctrine that emanated with

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one of the Alvars Madhura Kair, namely the deification of the immediate preceptor seems to have grown in vogue at this time

Vaishnavism had ceased to be a code of morality or a compendium of principles. It was not confined to the educated few. It had become the religion of the masses, and had proclaimed for the first time the fatherhood of the Lord of the Universe and the brotherhood of all living beings. The Vaishnava God lived, moved and had His being in His creations. He was the best friend of men and their wisest guide. He delighted in helping the misguided and in punishing the evil-doer in the interest of mankind. This naturally led to the theory that he must come to the world from time to time to do away with vice and to establish the reign of virtue. The theory was the origin of the belief in the incarnation of the Lord. We read in the Gita :—

यदा यदाहि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥

In the Santiparva of the Mahabharata Narad mentions the six incarnations of the Lord. These are --

Varaha --In this form (lit boar), Vishnu descended to deliver the world from the power of a demon called Hiranyaksha, who had seized the earth and carried it down into the lowest depths of the sea. Vishnu, as a boar, dived into the abyss, and after a contest slew the monster and raised the earth. In earlier books the Universe is represented as a mass of

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water and the earth being submerged was up-heaved by the tusks of the divine boar

Narasimha.—In this form (lit. man-lion) Vishnu assumed the shape of a creature, half-man and half-lion, to deliver the world from the tyranny of a demon called Hiranyakasepu—who had obtained a boon from Brahma that he should not be slain by either God or man or animal. Hence he became so powerful that he usurped the three worlds and appropriated the sacrifices made to the Gods. He had a son Prahlad—a true devotee of the Lord—whose devotion was put to severe tests by his demon father and it was to save this devotee that the Lord took this form.

Vaman.—This form (lit. dwarf) the Lord assumed to rid the world of the domination of the demon Bali. In one of his fits of charity Bali promised to give to the Vaman form of the Lord land measuring three spaces. The Lord strode in two steps over the heaven and the earth and out of compassion left Bali in possession of the lower world.

Parasu Ram.—This form was assumed with the object of teaching the warrior classes a lesson. In their pride of prowess they had ceased to render due homage to the Brahmans and to sacrificial rites. This naturally threatened to spread vice and check the growth of virtue. The Ram of the axe—as the word literally means—appeared to rid the world of the Kshatriya, and it is alleged that twenty one times did He succeed in doing so.

Ram.—The ideal conception of the Lord. In

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this form is held out the ideal son, the ideal brother, the ideal friend, the ideal husband and the ideal master Sweet in temper, gentle in disposition, kindly in temperament, wise in counsel, brave on the battlefield, obedient to his elders, loving to his dependants and youngers, Shri Ram is certainly the ideal man ever depicted in books or on canvas No better ideal has ever been placed before the world—an ideal which would suit all, young and old, rich and poor, king and subjects. To the left of Him is His divine spouse—Shri Sitaji, who embodies in herself all that is noblest and best, chaste and sweet, simple and modest in the womanhood of the world

Krishna.—In this form the Lord is all love—love for his mates, love for beasts, love for the trees, love for friends, love for the devotee and love for all those who pray for it Could there be a more loving picture than that of Brindaban? What could be more sweet than the gram of poor Sudama? How noble it was to condescend to serve as the charioteer of a friend! How unselfish to raise the drooping spirit of Arjun and to make him fight the righteous war! And those words of deep philosophy uttered on the occasion! Yet Krishna is love all over One loves him not for his philosophy or miracles, but for his sweet unassuming love

There were some who believed that while the Advaita of Sankara was a very philosophical doctrine, it fell far short of being a practical religion. In a code of morality, Advaita has a very high place, but if religion is to descend from the idealistic height of

philosophy to the region of the common people and if religion is not to be a mere intellectual treat for evening lectures, it must embody something of the physical in it. In its attempt to be a universal religion, the Vaishnavism of Ramanuja combined with its high philosophy an appreciation of the doctrine of love of God. The Vishestadvaita of Ramanuja with its *Bhakti* cult represents the other half of Advaita, a reaction of the soul, a feast of that heart which Advaita had starved. It is the deliberate choice, after long loneliness of the companionship of God and His devotees, after the silence of meditation, of song, after intellectual austerity, of the rich colours of affection. While the intellect can conceive of the theory of the One, unperceivable, unknowable and so forth, it can hardly picture anyone like that much less can meditate on Him. The Advaita would appear to ignore this aspect of things. Sankara is all reason, the Vaishnavas are all emotion and though during Ramanuja's time this emotion was sought to be kept fully under the control of reason, subsequent reformers have given the go-by to that control. But the value and significance of the *Bhakti* school lie in its affirmation of the claims of the human heart and in the moral and religious consequences that follow from that affirmation. These are the elements in it that give to it its power and enable it to make an appeal so far reaching and so profound. The heart and its emotions are much the same in all men, high or low, and the road to God along which affections lead the way is an open road. That is why Rama-

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nand discarded caste distinctions and had even a Mohammadan follower That is why they sang of Chaitanya as one who did "not believe in caste" It is well-know that the Mahratta saints were from all castes, from Brahmans to outcastes

Now what is this *Bhakti* In Vishnu Puran we find the following —

या प्रीति रविवेनानां विषयेष्वनपायिनी ।

त्वमनुस्मरतः सामे हृदयान्मापसर्पतु ॥

That undying love which the unknowing have for the fleeting worldly objects, may that sort of love never depart from my heart as I keep meditating on Thee In Shandilya Sutra *Bhakti* is described as सा परानुरक्तिरीश्वरे or the intense love of God In the Narad Sutra also *Bhakti* has been similarly described as ओं सा कस्मै परम प्रेम रूपा Ramanuja interpretes *Bhakti* to mean constant remembrance of the Lord, flowing like an unbroken stream of oil poured out from one vessel to another The following lines aptly describe the frame of mind of a Bhakta —

त्वमेव माता च पिता त्वमेव,

त्वमेव बन्धुश्च सखा त्वमेव ।

त्वमेव विद्या द्रविणं त्वमेव,

त्वमेव सर्वं मम देव देव ॥

In these lines the devotee asserts his belief that the Lord is his father, mother, brother and friend; He is the knowledge to be acquired, He is the wealth to be collected together, in fact He is the devotee's all, the Lord of all lords Tulsidas goes one

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step further and prays for the Lord's *Bhakti* not only in this life; but also during other rebirths. Tukaram thus describes himself:—

A beggar at thy door,
Pleading I stand.
Give me an alms, O God,
Love from thy loving hand

While Shri Rupkalaji would bid adieu even to the joys of heaven, if those joys meant separation from the Lord. During the time of the Alvars the Vedic sacrifices had disappeared and all that the devotee had to do were,—(1) recitation of the Lord's name, (2) service at the temples, and (3) contemplation of any of the personal forms of the Lord. In one ancient book, six modes of adoring Vishnu are given. These are (1) remembrance of Him, (2) utterance of his name and glory, (3) salutation, (4) resorting to his feet, (5) constant devotional worship and (6) surrender of the self. To these the Bhagwata Puran added three more, viz., hearing His praise, servitude and companionship. The last two are preliminary to the surrendering of the whole soul. During the time of Ramanuja eight more modes of worship were added. These were.—(1) imprinting the marks of the conch-shell and the discus and other weapons of Hari on the body, (2) the making of a vertical mark on the forehead, (3) repeating of *mantras* on the occasion, (4) drinking of the water used in washing the feet of Hari, (5) the eating of the offerings of cooked food made to Him, (6) doing service to his devotees,

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(7) the observance of fast on the *Ekadasi* day, and
(8) laying Tulsi leaves on the idol of Hari. During
the time of Ramanand bow, arrows and Chandrika
were substituted for conchshell, etc. The mark on
the forehead is different with the different schools of
Vaishnavism.

Tulsidas considerably simplified matters by
stating at the end of his Ramayan ---

यहि कलिकाल न साधन दूजा,
योग यज्ञ जप तप व्रत पूजा ।
रामहिं सुमिरिय गाइय रामहिं,
सन्तत सुनिय रामगुण ग्रामहिं ॥



Ramanuja.

CHAPTER IV.

सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म, नेह नानास्ति किञ्चन ।

The Lord pervades the whole universe. Nothing exists without Him

The above interpretation of the Sanskrit text was the cause of a dispute between Ramanuja and his teacher Yadavaprakash. But of this anon. Born in 1017 A.D. Lakshman, popularly known as Ramanuja, made his mark early as a voracious reader and as an erudite scholar of religious and philosophical literature. As a student his fame was so widespread that the great leader of Vaishnavism at the time known as Yamuna is said to have travelled in *cornito* to see him. His difference with his preceptor Yadavaprakash in the interpretation of scriptural passages—one of which is quoted above—made the latter anxious to get rid of him from his academy and even possibly from the world. A secret plot was hatched by Yadava; but it was timely discovered and Ramanuja ran away in time and saved himself. While once he was worshipping in the temple at Kanchi, he heard some one reciting a beautiful verse in praise of the Lord. Turning round he asked the stranger who the composer of the piece was. The reply came that it was Yamuna. Ramanuja next wanted to know if he could see Yamuna. “I will take you to

him" replied the stranger, who happened to be the eldest among the disciples of Yamuna. When the two reached Srirangam they found that Yamuna was already dead and that preparations were in progress for the disposal of his corpse. On going close to the body Ramanuja saw three out of the five fingers of the right hand of the dead person folded. Struck with this he enquired whether the defect was natural or was noticed only after death. The reply was that it was not natural. Ramanuja was further told that Yamuna had three of his cherished objects unfulfilled, namely, an easily read and understood commentary upon the Brahmasutra; the giving of the names of Parasara and Shadagopa to suitable persons who would make these names live among the people. As soon as Ramanuja had promised to see these fulfilled, the fingers straightened.

Returning to Kanchi, he resumed his old style of living. After sometime he felt a higher calling in his heart and ascertained from the elderly priest of the temple as to what the Lord's wish was. The reply was in a Sanskrit couplet which ran thus:—

श्रीमान् परम तत्त्वमहम् मतम् मे भेदः ।

प्रपत्तिर्निर्णायः हेतुः ॥

नवस्यकिञ्चः स्मृतिः ह्यन्तकाले मोक्षः ।

महापुर्णः रहस्यार्थवर्षः ॥

I am the supreme, my conviction is distinction

Devotion is the unfailing cause of salvation

Conscious volition not essential, release in the end,

At present Periyānambi is the highest preceptor

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In these lines was Ramanuja given the direction for his future work. He was to pin his faith in God and to work out the qualified monastic system of Indian philosophy accepting Periyānambi as his guide, and to proclaim the doctrine of devotion to God. Ramanuja now felt the call and started for Srirangam. He halted at Madhurantakam and went to the temple of Lord Rāmachandra to offer his prayers. While there he met Periyānambi, who had also gone to the temple for the same purpose. On enquiry it was found that each was on the look out for the other. At the importunate entreaties of Ramanuja, Periyānambi in the presence of Lord Rāmachandra initiated him into the mysteries of the hidden lore of the Vedānta of those times. Periyān and Ramanuja then returned to Kanchi and both began living together. It appears that Ramanuja was not quite fortunate in the selection of his wife. She had not realised the high ideals of Vaishnavism and was unduly obsessed with the revived Brahmanical rules of caste. On one occasion Ramanuja invited a friend of a different caste to his house. After he had departed Ramanuja's wife quickly washed the spot on which the friend sat. This was the subject of a long sermon to his wife by Ramanuja who expounded to her the lofty principles of the oneness of God and the futility of making such distinctions between one caste and another. Another incident that annoyed Ramanuja was her disobedience of his orders in the matter of giving alms to a certain wandering Sadhu. Ramanuja this time threatened

his wife with serious consequences should there be a recurrence of such incidents. But the lady soon found herself brandishing her superior caste. This time unfortunately the victim was the wife of Ramanuja's friend, guest and guide, Periyānambi. It so happened that the two ladies had gone to a well to draw water and while there some water from the pitcher of Periyā's wife dropped into that of the other. This roused the fury of Ramanuja's wife and she indulged in a free discussion of the relative social position of the two families. The other lady reported the incident to her husband who rather than offend Ramanuja quietly broke up his establishment and returned to Srirangam. Not long after Periyā's departure did Ramanuja find out the cause of this. He again explained to his wife her duties towards her husband but found that she was really inexorable. He therefore availed himself of an invitation from his father-in-law to send his wife to his house and then quietly put on the robe of a Sanyasi. At this time he was approached by the disciples of Yamuna to go and live at Srirangam. But before he could succeed to the Vaishnava *gaddi* there, he had to get himself initiated in every department of learning and philosophy which then constituted the Vaishnava lore. Ramanuja was once given a secret after the customary promise of not disclosing it except to a very worthy disciple previously tried. Ramanuja thought the secret to be of such efficacy for salvation that he at once proclaimed it to a large number of people. The irate preceptor sent for him and enquired of him the

reasons which prompted him to break his vow to his preceptor. Ramanuja admitted his guilt and wanted to know the punishment prescribed for it. "Eternal perdition in the life hereafter" was the preceptor's reply. "Don't care if in doing good to so many persons I am sent to hell" was Ramanuja's characteristic retort. The preceptor appreciated the spirit of this remark and condoned Ramanuja. Sometime after, Ramanuja went to Tirupathi and stayed there a year receiving instructions in the Ramayana from his maternal uncle. After acquiring the necessary qualifications Ramanuja ascended the *gaddi* of Yamuna. In his later years he was subjected to persecution by the Chola Kings, in consequence of which he had to take refuge in the dominions of the Mysore prince. This king known as Vithpaldeva became a Vaishnava, assuming the name of Vishnuvardhana.

Ramanuja is the founder of what is called the Shri school of Vaishnavism. According to this *Bhakti* consists in constant and uninterrupted meditation on the Lord. This is to be attained by (1) purity of body and mind—(2) controlling of passion—(3) practice—(4) cultivation of virtues such as uprightness, truth, compassion, etc,—(5) absence of despondency—(6) performance of duty and (7) avoidance of elatedness. According to this school *Karma Yoga* or the performance of actions as well as *Jnana Yoga* or the acquisition of knowledge are of great efficacy for *Bhakti*.

Once while Ramanujacharya was describing to

his disciples the modes of acquiring *Bhakti*, one of them enquired of him whether it was possible to do away with *Karma* and *Jnana*. Ramanuja replied that in that case he should repeat the *Mantra* given by his preceptor a certain number of times and recite some prayers embodying complete surrender to the Lord. The disciple enquired what should be done if even these could not be done regularly. Ramanuja replied that the only other way in that case was to surrender oneself to his preceptor and to be guided by him in everything.

According to Ramanuja the Lord of the Universe is eternal, pervading all living and non-living beings, and creating, protecting, and destroying the world. He reveals himself in five different modes. These are (1) *Para* in which the Lord is said to be living in *Baikuntha*, (2) *Vyuha* in which the *Para* assumes four different forms for different purposes in connection with the creation; (3) *Vibhava* in which the Lord incarnates himself, (4) *Antarajamin* in which the Lord is said to be in the heart of every individual, and (5) *Archa* in which the Lord is supposed to exist in every idol which a devotee may set up for him. Ramanuja was the first to formulate a systematic opposition to the *adwaita* philosophy of Sankara. He agreed with Sankara that God alone exists and all else that is seen or perceived is His manifestation. But whereas the *Adwaita* would regard the manifestations as unreal and temporary, Ramanuja and the school to which he belonged regarded them as real and permanent though subject to the control of that One

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Sankara takes the word *Neti Neti* to mean the negation of all that exists while to Ramanuja this word only implies the incapacity to know fully the Lord through these manifestations "In effect what the Shri school teaches is that it not possible to form an idea of the Lord through his manifestations and that he cannot be ever fully known and properly understood. It is a pity that a religion with such a high philosophy has often been attacked by some people as idolatry The truth is that while Vaishnavism has sought to be philosophical it has never forgotten that religion is intended not for any particular class or community but for the masses and as such though its teachings may soar high the matter of fact world should never be forgotten. The result is the great inconsistency which we find in the preachings and practice of some other religions Those who denounce the Vaishnavas for their pilgrimage to Ajodhya or Muttra themselves go to Jerusalem or Mecca and those who cry them down for having a beautiful bronze or stone idol are themselves found to treasure and adore the pictures and paintings of their prophets and saints

Ramanuja was the worshipper of the Lord in the form of Narayan and Lakshmi He denied to women and Sudra the privilege of reading the Vedas. He was strongly opposed to women entering the holy order As to why he laid down these restrictions it is not very clear. Possibly because he laid a very great stress on purity and the controlling of passions, he was opposed to the introduction of the

fair sex among the Sadhus In one place speaking about *Bhakti* Ramanuja says "knowing (the Lord) which is the same as repeated worship" has been described as constant remembering.....Thus the memory which has attained to the height of what is as good as direct perception, is spoken of in the *Sruti* as a means of liberation This *Atman* is not to be reached through various sciences, nor by intellect, nor by much study of the Vedas. Whomsoever this *Atman* desires, by him is the *Atman* attained, unto him this *Atman* discovers himself. Here after saying that mere hearing, thinking, and meditation are not the means of attaining this *Atman* it is said, 'whom this *Atman* desires by him is the *Atman* attained' 'The extremely' beloved alone is desired, by whomsoever this *Atman* is extremely loved, he alone becomes the most beloved of the *Atman*. That this beloved may attain the *Atman*, the Lord himself helps For it has been said by the Lord — "Those who are constantly attached to me and worship me with love—I give that direction to their will, by which they come to me" Therefore it is said that to whomsoever this remembering, which is of the same form as direct perception become of itself very dear, for the reason that it is dear to the object of such memory perception, he alone is desired by the supreme *Atman*, i. e. by him alone the supreme *Atman* is attained. This constant remembrance is denoted by the word *Bhakti*. It will be clear from the above that in Ramanuja's scheme of things, study of the Vedas was not necessary for the realisation

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of God. In fact it was no more necessary to the Brahman than to the Sudra, to the male than to the female. It could not therefore be on religious grounds that Ramanuja interdicted the study of Vedas from women and Sudra. My own opinion is that he was acting in this particular matter more as a social reformer than as a religious preacher. Buddhism had thrown the whole social organisation of India into the melting pot Sankara by his doctrine of unreality had similarly supported the Buddhistic revolution. It was therefore according to Ramanuja an absolute necessity to revive the old caste system and to place the Hindu society on some form of social stability. Ramanuja is thus found playing a dual role of a religious preacher as well as a social reformer. And it would be ungenerous to him to mix up the two roles together. Ramanuja's religion offered salvation to all and could be adopted by anyone. Ramanuja's reforms were intended only for the Hindu society and had a special bearing on the customs and manners of the time. This latter was not and could not be as the former was, a truism for ever.



Nimbarka.

CHAPTER V.

दृष्टिं सृष्टि-रपि नैव सम्मता दर्शनात्तत्र फलं यतः स्थिरम् ।
सार्थको भवति यत्र शब्दक. सर्व एव परदेवताऽत्मनि ॥

This hymn of Nimbarka has been thus translated — “The theory of (illusion of form) is not reasonable for the meditation (vision) of Thee (Thy form) bestows the eternal fruit (*Moksha*) The Vedic words become only significant, when they refer to the highest god, the *Atman*.” Nimbarka, like Ramanuja gave predominance to self-surrender. But unlike Ramanuja his *Bhakti* was not mere meditation as prescribed in the Upanishads but love of God in the sense the Alvars understood it. But the great difference between the two was that while to Ramanuja the Lord was the Narayan and his consorts Lakshmi, Bhu and Lila, Nimbarka gave an almost exclusive prominence to Krishna and Radha.

It is difficult to say when exactly Nimbarka was born or when he died. There are conflicting versions of the period when he flourished; but taking all the available materials into consideration, it can be safely asserted that he lived in the 12th century of the Christian era. He was possibly a Tailanga Brahmana by birth and hailed from Vaiduripatan in the Nizam's dominion of Hyderabad. His father's

name was Arun Muni and his mother's Jayanti and his day of birth was the full moon day of the month of Kartick Nimbarka is regarded by his followers as an incarnation of the discus of Vishnu

Nimbarka wrote several books in Sanskrit These were the Vedanta Parijata Saurabha, the Sidhanta Ratna, Gita Bhashya (unavailable), Rahasy Khordashi, Propanya Kalvatti, Bhagwat Astotra, Propathi Chintamani and Sadachar Prakash He believed in worship through the medium of Sanskrit His Vedantic theory is monistic as well as dualistic According to him the inanimate world and the individual soul have both independent existence but are both dependant on God for their existence and action Ramanuja's theory of the Brahma forming with the animate and inanimate world a composite personality and of its being the material cause in so far as the bodily portion of the composite personality becomes developed, is rejected by the school of Nimbarka

The whole system of Nimbarka is clearly set forth in his Sidhantaratna commonly called the Dasastoti,—a translation of which as given by Sir R G Bhandarkar is printed below :—

I *Jiva*, or the individual soul, is knowledge,
dependent on Hari, and is in a condition to
be associated with, or dissociated from,
a body, is an atom, different in different
bodies, and is a knower and numberless

It is called knowledge here to show that it
is able to know without the organs of

sense, and it is not to be understood here that the soul is the mere phenomenon of knowledge, and not a substance, which is the doctrine of Sankara.

- II The individual soul has his form distorted by its contact with *Maya* or *Prakṛiti*, or the constituent principle with the three qualities which has no beginning. Its true nature becomes known by the grace of God.

Individual souls are of two sorts. (1) those delivered or in a supremely blissful condition; (2) those tied down to the circle of existences. The first are of two kinds (1) those who are eternally in a supremely blissful condition, such as (a) Garuda, Viśvakṣena and (b) the crown, ear-ornaments, and the flute considered as living beings; and (2) those who are freed from the trammels of life. Of these last some attain to the likeness of God and others are content with the preception of the nature of their own soul. Corresponding to the two last are two kinds of Mumukṣhu, those who seek deliverance of either kind.

- III The inanimate objects are of three kinds. (1) not derived from *Prakṛiti*, (2) derived from *Prakṛiti*, and (3) time. In the things derived from *Prakṛiti* we have the ordinary material objects having the three colours, viz., red, white and dark.

The first class consists of those which are spoken of figuratively by the use of the names of objects belonging to the second class, such as the sunlike refulgence of the supreme soul. It is a refulgence not arising from the *Prakṛiti*. Similarly the body, hands, feet and ornaments of God, as well as all the surroundings, such as garden, palace, etc., belong to the first class and are of an inanimate nature, though they are not made of matter, i.e., not derived from *Prakṛiti*.

IV. I meditate on the highest *Brahman*, viz. Krishna who has eyes like the lotus, who naturally is free from all faults, is the store of all beneficent attributes, who has *Vyūhas* for his parts, and who is adored by all.

The *Vyūhas* here mentioned are those usually referred to in the Panchratra and Ramanuja systems. The commentators understand the incarnations, also by this expression. One gives a large number of these, divided into classes on certain principles. Krishna is called *Varenya* or adored by all because he has a holy celestial body and bodily qualities, such as beauty, tenderness, sweetness and charm. All these are of course non-material (*Aprakṛita*), though inanimate according to stanza III.

V. I reflect on the daughter of Vrsabhanu

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(Radhika), who shines with a corresponding beauty on the left side (of Krishna), is attended on by thousands of female friends, and who always confers all desired objects

VI This *Parabrahma* should be always worshipped uninterruptedly by men in order to be free from the darkness in the shape of ignorance, in which they are enveloped. So was Narada, who directly perceived the whole truth, taught by Sanandana and others

VII All things having *Brahma* for their souls in accordance with the Srutis and Smritis, the knowledge that (*Brahma*) is all is true. This is the doctrine of those who know the Vedas and at the same time the three forms are true as determined from the sacred precept (Smritis) and the Sutras

There is laid down the unity of all things in so far as *Brahma* is the inner controlling soul of all and is concomitant with them and their existence and actions are dependent on it, and also pluralism, since there are three distinct substances, which are called forms of *Brahma* in the stanza, viz, the inanimate world, the individual soul and the supreme soul

VIII There appears no way to salvation except the lotus-like feet of Krishna, which are adored by Brahmadeva, Siva and others—Krishna, who, at the desire of a devotee,

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assumes a form easy of meditation and whose power is unthinkable and whose essence cannot be comprehended

- IX His grace extends itself to those who have a feeling of helplessness, and other qualifications, and by that grace is generated *Bhakti*, or devotion, consisting of special love for him, who has no superior Lord. This *Bhakti* is of two kinds the highest is one, and the other is that which leads to or is instrumental to it

By the feeling of helplessness and other qualifications are meant the six modes of *Prapatti* given in connection with Ramanuja's system. The *Bhakti* which is instrumental to that which is the highest, is of the nature of the six or nine modes mentioned in previous sections

- X. These five things should be known by the devotees (1) the nature of the being to be worshipped, (2) the nature of the worshipper; (3) the fruit God's grace, (4) the feeling of enjoyment consequent on *Bhakti*, or love; (5) obstructions to the attainment of God.

The first is the knowing of the nature of the supreme being as existence, intelligence and joy (*Sachidananda*), of his possessing a celestial body (non-material), of his dwelling in such places as the cow-settlement (*Braja*) which is called the celestial

city (*Byomapura*), of his being the cause of all, omnipotent, tender, merciful, gracious towards his devotees, and so forth. The second consists in knowing the worshipper as an atom, possessing knowledge and joy, and as the servant of Krishna etc. The third is the self-surrender and the giving up of all actions except the service of God, which results in self-surrender. The fourth arises from serenity, servitude, friendliness, affection and enthusiasm. These states of mind are consequent upon the peculiar relation to God of each individual, as affection was the feeling of Nanda, Vasudeva and Devaki, and enthusiasm of Radha and Rukmini. The fifth are such as regarding the body as the soul, dependence on others than God and one's preceptor, indifference to the commands of God contained in the sacred books, worshipping other gods, giving up one's own peculiar duties, ingratitude, spending one's life in a worthless manner, vilification of good men, and many others.

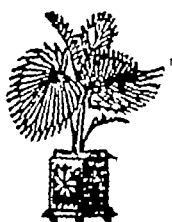
These ten stanzas contain the quintessence of Nimbarka's system, which is known by the name of Sanaka Sampradaya, as opposed to the Shri Sampradaya of Ramanuja, the Sat Sampradaya of Madhava and the Rudra Sampradaya of Ballabhacharya. Nimbarka consistently opposed the *Maya* doctrine of Sankara and helped considerably in the spread of

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Vaishnavism in the north of India. A deathblow had already been given to Sankara's doctrines by the philosophy of Ramanuja. Nimbarka went one step further introduced not the form of a Lord reposing peacefully attended by his wife—as Ramanuja had advocated—but that of a youthful Lord sporting merrily with the Gopis, the chief of whom was Shri Radha. This gave to the Vaishnavism of the north a note of human sympathy which made the religion highly popular and was a distinct improvement on the highly puritanical teachings of Ramanuja. The following *Sloka*, commonly recited by the followers of Nimbarka, describes the Lord —

ध्यायेत्कृष्णं सुरललले नूलनाम्भोधरामम्, बहीपीडं मधुरमधुरं
वाद्यन्तंचयेणुम् श्रोवत्साङ्गं नलिन नयनं राधिकांहासयन्तं गो-
भिर्गोपैर्व्रजयुवतिमिर्वेष्टितं पीतं वस्त्रम् ॥ १ ॥

Meditate on Krishna—the lotus-eyed, the cloud-coloured, with the crown of peacock feathers on the head, the mark of *Shribats* on the chest, clad in bright yellow cloth, the sweetly-playing flute touching His lips and standing under the *Kalpa* tree—with smiling Radhika by his side and cows, boys and guls of Braja surrounding Him !



Madhava.

CHAPTER VI.

सशङ्खचक्रं सकिरीटकुण्डलं सपीतवस्त्रं सरसीस्हेक्षणम् ।
सहारवक्षः स्थलकौस्तुभश्रियं नमामि त्रिष्णुं शिरसा चतुर्भुजं ॥

I bow in salutation to the lotus-eyed Vishnu, the four-armed, clad in yellow garments and holding the conch and disc in His hands with the crown on His head and rings in His ears and garland of *Kaustubh* gem dangling on His chest

Madhava was another great religious teacher of the middle ages who was uncompromising in his denunciation of the cult of illusion preached by Sankara. We have seen how Ramanuja propounded the doctrine of the Lord's being a composite person having for his body the individual souls and the inanimate world, evidently in his anxiety to reconcile this with the theory set forth in the *Brahmasutras*, on the basis of the *Upanishads*, that the Lord is the material as well as the efficient cause of the world. Even this much Madhava was not prepared to admit. He was of opinion that Ramanuja's doctrine had a tendency to depreciate the independent majesty of the Lord, and he therefore denied altogether that the material cause of the world is the Lord. He has so interpreted the *Sutras* of Badarayana on this subject as to support his contention. As opposed to the pure *advaita* of Sankara and the qualified *advaita* of Ramanuja, Madhava has his *dvaita* or duality.

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According to him there are five eternal distinctions or individualities. These are the distinctions between (1) God and the individual spirit, (2) God and the inanimate world, (3) the individual spirit and the inanimate world, (4) one individual spirit and another and (5) one inanimate object and another. It is through knowledge that these distinctions can be fully understood and appreciated.

Madhava was born of a Tulu Brahman in a village near the small town of Udipi in the district of South Canara. There is considerable difference of opinion regarding the year of his birth. Mr. Krishna-swami Iyer believes it to be 1199 A D. Mr. Krishna Sastri and Mr. C M P Achar fix it during 1238 A D. Sir R. G. Bhandarkar is of opinion that Madhava was born about 1254. His parents named him as Vasudeva. Early in life Vasudeva conceived the idea of renouncing worldly life and becoming a Sanyasi. This was no easy matter as the boy happened to be the only child of his parents, who as orthodox people were very anxious to have their funeral rites performed by their son. On the earnest entreaties of the parents Vasudeva is said to have put off the renunciation by a few years; but immediately after the birth of a younger brother, he put on the garb of a Sanyasi and retired from the world.

On his becoming a Sanyasi, he assumed the name of Madhava. He went about from place to place, holding discourses, indulging in disputations and propounding his own doctrines. He was

generally successful and came out victorious in every disputation. In one, however, he received a bad defeat from one of the followers of Sankara. Madhava seemed never to have forgiven Sankara this defeat from one of his disciples and throughout his life carried on an internecine warfare against the *advaita* school of philosophy.

Madhava was much persecuted by the other religious schools of his time, specially by the followers of Sankara. On one occasion even his library was forcibly appropriated by the head of the Sringeri *mutt*. No authentic record regarding the manner in and the date on which he met his death is available. There is a tradition believed in by his followers to the effect that while he sat teaching to his disciples one day, he suddenly disappeared and nothing further was seen or heard of him.

Madhava is the founder of one of the four *Sampradayas* of Vaishnavism, known as the *Sudra Sampradaya*. Being founded on logic and grammar, Madhava's *dvaita* philosophy starts, as we have seen, with a five-fold hypothesis. A belief in the five prime, real and eternal distinctions is what one has to begin with. The *dvaita* philosophy repudiates in unmistakable terms the monism of Sankara and the modified dualism of Ramanuja. The phenomenal world is real and eternal. The supreme spirit is Vishnu or Narayan and is the Personal First Cause, the moral and intelligent Governor of the Universe. Souls are divided into three classes each having its distinctive from. Those belonging to the first class

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are destined for eternal residence in the abode of Narayan. Those of the second class are ever subject to births and deaths, while those classed under the third class are doomed to perdition for ever. The above represents in brief outline the principles of the philosophy of the school founded by Madhava



Ballabha.

CHAPTER VII.

दोभ्यां दोभ्यां ब्रजन्तं ब्रजसदनं जनाह्वानतः प्रोल्लसन्तम्,
मन्दं मन्दं हसन्तं मृदु मधुरवचो मेति मेति ब्रुवन्तम् ।
गोपाली पाणिताली तरलित वलयध्वनिमुग्धान्तरालम्,
बन्धे तं देवमिन्दीवर बिमल दल श्यामलं नन्दबालम् ॥

Salutation to Thee, the Son of Nanda—of the colour of the petals of the blue lotus, moving on His hands and knees, delighting in the invocation of the residents of Braja, now smiling, at another time in lovely sweet voice crying Mother! Mother! and feeling enamoured of the quick and sweet jingling sound of the bangles of the *Gopis* while clapping their hands

Another great religious reformer among the Vaishnavas was Ballabhacharya. The founder of one of the four schools of Vaishnavism, known as the Rudra Sampradaya, he preached the worship of Vishnu in the form of *Bal Gopal* or the child Krishna. The most unselfish love is that of the parents for the only child, and the exacting care and constant attention that the child requires evidently suggests that the Lord should not be forgotten even for a moment. The noble idea underlying appears to be to make the devotee devote every minute of his life to the service of the Lord. Now waking up the Lord, at another time putting him into the cradle, then taking him out for a walk and again feeding him and so on and so forth; and thus keeping oneself

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ever busy with the Lord surely this is meditation of a high order. According to Ballabha, Krishna pervades the entire universe, there is no difference between Brahma and Jiva, the *Gopal* form is the sublimest of all forms of Krishna for purposes of worship. His worship alone confers salvation on human beings.

This school traces its origin from Shiva. Later on it was Vishnu Swami who propounded some of its principles, and he was followed by Gyan Deva, Nam Deva and Trilochan Deva. The school excluded non-Brahmans from being initiated and naturally enough for others could hardly be expected to do the service that the school enjoins. It was Ballabha who for the first time codified and organised the teachings of this school and gave to these a separate name and existence.

Ballabha saw the light of day in the 16th century, his father being Lakshman Bhatt, a Tailang Brahman. Holding the views that he did he settled at Gokul, the place where the child Krishna spent his childhood. After some time he went out on a pilgrimage and on return stayed at Brindaban, where he is alleged to have a vision of the Lord in the form he loved to dotc upon. Ballabha spent his old age in the city of Benares, and it is said that one morning while he was bathing in the Ganges, he suddenly disappeared and was heard of no more. One of the finest temples of Benares belongs to this school and is popularly known as *Bal-Gopal ka Māndir*.

Ramanand.

CHAPTER VIII.

नीलाम्बुज श्यामल कोमलाङ्गं सीता समारो पितृवाम भागम् ।

पाणौ महासायक चारुचापं नमामि रामं रघुवंशनाथम् ॥

Salutations to Shri Ram—the Lord of the family of Raghu—who is tender-bodied and of the colour of the blue lotus and who is armed with a beautiful bow and by whose side is sitting Shri Sitaji! This is the picture of the Lord which Ramanand loved to meditate upon. Following on the qualified *advaita* philosophy of Ramanuja in which the Lord was imagined to be peacefully reposing on the back of a hydra-headed snake, with Shri Lakshmi quietly champooing his legs or of Nimbarka wherein the Lord was believed to be ever sporting with Shri Radha, Ramanand propounded what is now called the cult of Rama. In this the Lord is imagined to be a king sitting half kneeling with a bow on His shoulder. The idea evidently is that He is ever ready to run to the assistance of His devotees. By His side sits Shri Sitaji, the tender-hearted Mother of the universe and the fountain head of mercy. Such a lofty conception of the Lord indicates that there is hope even for the worst sinner, for though the Lord is there to mete out justice, the Mother of the universe will not fail to

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have that justice tempered with mercy. The vast majority of the people of the world are householders and it is but natural that their conception of the Lord should readily paint within their mind the picture of an ideal householder with his dutiful wife. What sympathy can a being who has not lived like us feel for us? What assistance can one give us who cannot realize our needs? Then again what love can we have for one who is a mere negation of all attributes such as nameless, formless, abodeless or unknowable, undiscernable, unperceivable and so forth. The Vaishnava therefore would go to the other extreme. The Lord pervades all, He is everywhere and in everything, He is the possessor of all good qualities; He can be seen, known, perceived and so on. This other conception of the Lord at once brings Him down within our easy reach, and raises in our mind pictures of Him indicative of the attributes we may be willing to ascribe to Him. But what attributes does He not possess? A form therefore must give prominence to the chief of these attributes. Shri Sita Ram contains all those principal attributes that a householder would discern in the Lord of the universe. That is why the Shri Sita Ram cult is becoming more and more popular.

It was no new cult that Ramanand founded. Shri Ram had been regarded as an incarnation of the Lord before the time of Buddha. In the Mahabharata are passages which go to show that the worship of Shri Ram as the divine being was not unknown even in the pre-Buddhist era. Valmiki has written

his well-known idyll in glorification of Shri Ram and his consort Shri Sita Valmiki's Ramayan must have been composed before the spread of Buddhism That is sufficiently clear from a perusal of the book itself Judging from the writings of the poets in other ages and climes, the principle will have to be admitted that it is only a popular story that a poet sings about The hero and heroine are generally persons widely known No one sits down to write an idyll on an imaginary story with characters which are utter strangers to the generation. The worship of Shri Sita Ram must therefore have been popular and the story well-known before Valmiki reduced the latter to poetry. In one of his verses Patanjali describes how certain musical instruments were played in a gathering in the temples of Dhanapati, Ram and Kesava Two things are clear from the above The first is that in the days of Patanjali there were temples of Shri Ram The second thing is that at those temples songs were sung and instruments played upon on festive occasions Patanjali is said to have flourished about the 4th century before Christ If no traces of old temples are to be found now, the obvious reason is that Buddhism in its early period levelled down all the existing temples and since Buddhism was the religion of the reigning sovereigns no new temples were raised till the religion of Buddha began to decline in India That is why few architectural monuments of Vaishnavism of the pre-Buddhist period are now to be found in India But the Ellora caves contain one three-storied cave with the idol of

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Ram inside It is significant that the caves contain little traces of Buddhism. Cave structures have never been in general use during the post-Christ period. It is not the purpose of the writer to discuss here the different theories regarding the date of the Ellora paintings. It is however evident to anyone who is familiar with Buddhist period of Indian history, that no such images could have been carved out during the time Buddhism was the predominant religion in India. The Ellora caves with the idol of Ram carved inside must therefore belong to the pre-Buddhist period. Shri Ram was thus worshipped long before Buddha was born. The celebrated poet Kalidas in his *Raghuvansa* relates the story of the birth of Ram. Once when the people afflicted with the ravages of Ravan prayed to the Lord to save them, he promised to be born in the world as the son of Dasarath. Kalidas takes us to a period either a century before or a century after the birth of Christ. Among the Tamil poets of the early Christian era Kulasekhar Alvar is found to invoke Shri Sita Ram as the Lord of Universe. Kulu was one of the most celebrated of the Alvars and has left behind quite a number of songs addressed to his celebrated deity. Then again in *Vayupurana*—one of the earliest post-Christ books—reference is frequently made to the belief in Ram as the incarnation of the Lord. It would be interesting to note how Ramanuja himself worshipped before the idol of Shri Ram. It has been said that while going out in search of Periyannambi he was attracted to a spot where by the side of

a beautiful tank stood a majestic temple with an image of Shri Ram in it Ramanuja went inside the temple and for long remained there praying before the idol This attracted the attention of Periya who had himself gone there to worship the Lord Subsequently when Ramanuja entreated Periya to give him some lessons he swore by the image of Shri Ram that he would keep the knowledge a secret If this represents the faith of Ramanuja in the Shri Ram cult another equally historic incident may be cited from the life of the founder of *Sad* Vaishnavism Madhava brought the image of Shri Ram from Badrikasram; while one of his favourite disciples Narharitiratha was sent to Puri by Madhava to bring the original idol of Shri Sita and Shri Ram It is thus amply clear that the founders of both the *Shri* and the *Sad* *Sampradayas* were both at least during the first half of their life worshippers of the Shri Ram form of the Lord As to when the former became a believer in Shri Lakshmi Narayan and the latter in Shri Vishnu Bhagwan it is not possible to say with certainty A later writer Hemadri describes the modes of worshipping Shri Sita Ram at some length. Any way long before Ramanand appeared on the scene Shri Sita Ram was worshipped in India and had temples, where people congregated in large numbers

The distinguishing feature of Ramanand's teaching was a spirit of sympathy for the lower castes and classes of the Hindu society. While Ramanuja, Nimbarka and Madhava kept these castes and classes

into what may be called outer court and imposed certain restrictions on them regarding the modes of worship, etc. Ramanand began a radical reform and abolished all distinction between Brahman and Sudra. According to him a Brahman could easily dine with a Sudra if the latter was a Vaishnava and had been admitted into the fold. This characteristic of the school of Ramanand is being literally followed to-day at Ayodhya. Like the earlier Alvars Ramanand also utilized the vernacular as the medium of his preachings. The Lord could be accessible as much in one language as in another and ignorance of any particular language should be no bar to a devotee anxious to pray to his Lord. In this matter Ramanand received very great assistance from his followers chiefly Tukidas, Nabha and Kabir. It was the ambition of Ramanand to carry religion to the very doors of the people and it must be said to his credit that his teachings and example inspired quite a number of his followers to carry his torch to the farthest unit as well as to the most degraded of castes. Another characteristic of Ramanand's philosophy is the supreme position that he gives to Shri Sita Ram. It is by this name that he addresses the Lord of the Universe. To him Shri Ram was not a mere incarnation but the Lord himself, much in the same way as Shri Laksmi Narayan was to Ramanuja. With those there reservations Ramanand may be regarded as a follower of Ramanuja. Of course instead of the discus and conch-shell of Ramanuja were substituted the bow, arrow and *chordala* by Ramanand.

RAMANAND.

Ramanand was not a very great believer in the acquisition of knowledge for the purpose of religious advancement. He was not one of those who would go to an orchard to count the number of leaves of a certain tree, he would much rather eat the fruit. To a traveller on the religious path it was, according to him, a matter of very little concern whether the soul was the same as God or different from Him, whether the world was real or unreal, whether life was eternal or ephemeral. These discussions were to him like the counting of the leaves of a tree. His six principal teachings are thus enunciated by Shri Rupkalaji.—

- (1) Physical body and soul are quite distinct ; learn to distinguish between the two.
- (2) Man not is independent of the Lord ; he is entirely in His hands
- (3) Man should serve and obey Him alone
- (4) Let not the mind and heart rest on objects of the five senses , sensuality is infidelity
- (5) Be never anxious for protection ; the Lord alone can protect you
- (6) Do not regard anyone as your helper, for He alone can help you

Holding these views Ramanand naturally laid great stress on the cultivation of *Bhakti*, and for this he prescribed the constant recitation of the name of the Lord as well as contemplation of His divine attributes. Contemplation to be constant requires the assistance of some physical object, for no one

has ever succeeded in keeping the mind tied on to some airy nothing. Service at the temple, service of the spiritual guide and service of humanity are therefore regarded as material helpers to the Vaishnava in his yearning for *Bhakti*

Ramanand, according to one authority, was born in 1300 A. D. and lived up to quite an old age, having died in 1411 A. D. There is not any particularly noteworthy trait in his life which deserves to be recorded. It has been asserted in some quarters that he was insulted by the Vaishnavas in the south and he migrated to the north and founded his school. Jealousy has ever dogged the steps of all big men, and it is no wonder if some pettyminded people witnessing the great triumph of Ramanand circulated some cock and bull story about him. Highly tolerant, ever forgiving and extremely devout as Ramanand was, it is utterly impossible to believe that he could have taken any insult from mere men to heart and propagated a faith he did not believe in with the object of spiting others. Ramanand never claimed any leadership for himself; he loved to describe himself as a follower of Ramanuja. That is another reason for holding that he had no ill will against the southern followers of Ramanuja.

Ramanand can fairly be called the founder of a fresh school of Vaishnavism; and it can be rightly urged that there is as little common between him and Ramanuja as between Ramanuja and Nimbarka. His principles are distinct from those of Ramanuja, his philosophy is different, his faith is not similar

and in fact his school should be regarded as quite separate from that of the founder of the *Shri Sampradaya*. The vast majority of the Vaishnavas in upper India belong to the *Shri Ram Sampradaya* and can by no stretch of imagination be dubbed as followers of Ramanuja.

Ramanand was a radical reformer and his precepts and examples have to this day turned many a wavering Hindu into a devout Vaishnava. In the selection of his disciples he refused to be trammelled by considerations of caste and creed. The names of some of his chief disciples are given below — (1) Anantanand, (2) Sursaranand, (3) Sukhanand, (4) Narhariyanand, (5) Yogananda, (6) Pipa, (7) Kabir, (8) Bhavanand, (9) Sena, (10) Dhanna, (11) Galvanand, (12) Raidas and (13) Padmavati. Of these Pipa was a Rajput, Dhanna a Jat, Sena a barber and Raidas a cobbler, Padmavati was a woman and Kabir a non-Hindu. It will be seen from the above list that Ramanand violated the teachings of Ramanuja in admitting a woman to the order of monkhood. Another innovation introduced by him was his initiation of Kabir as a disciple. Even now in almost every temple of Ajodhya Kabir receives almost as great honour as his preceptor Ramanand. Raidas confined his preachings to the men of his own caste and even today the absence of the drink habit in a portion of that community is entirely due to his influence.

Among Ramanand's disciples Kabir occupies a very prominent place, both because of his teachings

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as well as of his being a non-Hindu. At one place Kabir strongly condemns the worship of idols. The religion propagated by him is a pure spiritual Theism. His mode of worship consisted in prayers and praises alone. He has said in one of his *Sakhis* — If you want me (God) give up your desire for every other thing and become mine and then everything will be yours.....in this world all have passed away considering themselves to be Ram but no one actually became Ram. Kabir says that those who know Ram as he truly is attain all their objects.



Chaitanya.

CHAPTER IX.

बन्धु तुमि से अमार प्राण ।

पिसिति रसेते ढालि तनुमन दियादि तोमार पाय ।

तुमि मोर पति तुमि मोर गति मम नाहि आन नाथ ॥

—A Bengali Vaishnava

O my Beloved! You are my life Overflowing with the milk of human love, I have poured my whole body and mind at Your feet You are my husband, You are my source of salvation, I have nobody else.

What Ramanand and his followers did for the Hindi-speaking people, Chaitanya did for Bengal. During his time Hinduism in Bengal consisted mainly of mechanical religious ceremonials with no element of *bhakti* and embittered by rigid distinctions of castes and sub-castes Chaitanya raised his voice against these, decried the ceremonial side of religion and encouraged the cultivation of the emotional side Like Ramanand he condemned the distinction of castes and admitted all, including even Muham-madans and the untouchable Hindus to Vaishnavism His teaching inculcated the doctrine that the easiest and surest way of attaining God was by *bhakti* and that to create this *bhakti*, one has to resort to *kirtans* or the fervent singing of songs about the love of Radha and Krishna

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It was on the full-moon day of Phalgun in the year 1407 of the Saka era, corresponding to 1455 A.D. that the boy Nimai or Visvambhar, the future Chaitanya was born in the city of Nabadwip or Nadiya on the Ganges—then a seat famous for its intellectual eminence. His father Pandit Jagannath Misra *alias* Purandhar Misra—a pious Vaidika Brahmin emigrated from Sylhet in Eastern Bengal and settled at Nadiya where he married Sachi Devi, daughter of Nilamber, a learned man of the place. Their first child was Visvarupa who is designated as Nitayananda in the history of Chaitanya. These were the only two sons of Jagannath Misra, and between these were eight daughters who died young. Chaitanya was named Visvambhar. His neighbours gave him the name Nimai (bitter) as a protection against all evil influences. He was also called 'Gouranga' because of his transcendental personal beauty and Gour Hari as he was very fond of the name of Hari, so much so that in his infantile fits of crying, nothing could soothe him except the chanting of that name. He became afterwards Krishna Chaitanya and was considered by his disciples and is even reckoned by modern Gaudiya Vaishnavas as the incarnation of Krishna himself.

His early life was frolicsome, mischievous and worrying to his parents. About the ninth year of his age, he was invested with the sacred thread and was placed in the *tal* of Gangadas, a Pandit of the place. Nimai's mental powers were extraordinary.

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He finished his education at a comparatively early age and at the age of sixteen he found himself strong enough to be able to start an independent *tol* of his own. He was the youngest professor then who had ever taken charge of a *tol* in Nadiya. When he was eighteen years of age he was married to Lakshmi daughter of Vallabh Acharya and began to live the life of a householder, taking pupils, and giving them secular instruction.

About this time Nimai came across Iswar Puri, a disciple of Madhavendra Puri, the most pious man of his age, who created in him a liking for Vaishnavism, soon after he conceived the idea of proceeding to the eastern districts. The object of his expedition is not known but it is generally believed that he had gone there with a view to collect donations for his institution. Begging and singing were his occupation during that time and it is said that he left those districts in a state of convulsion. During his peregrinations his wife died and on his return home, he was again married to Vishnupriya, a girl of great gentleness and devotion to Chaitanya.

After sometime in September 1508 A D at the age of twenty-three, with some of his friends, he set out for Gaya to make offerings to his manes. He entered the city with devotion and deep emotion. He went to see the foot-prints of Vishnu in the Vishnupad Mandir, his gaze became rivetted thereto and he stood enthralled and motionless there as a statue. He became oblivious of all around him and was about to fall down when Ishwar Puri who

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As they were witnessing this scene ran to his support and prevented him from falling on the ground. After this incident Ishwar Puri on an auspicious day finally initiated him in the Vaishnavite faith by breathing *mantra* in his ears.

Soon after he left Gaya for his home but it brought about a great change in him. From this time, he remained in constant deep meditation, apparently unconscious of his surroundings with an expression of manifold pathos in his face. He would often weep or laugh and pass into trance or swoon and exclaim "where art Thou my Krishna, my Father." When he reached Nadīya he lived there also in total abstraction. His heart was in a state of convulsion owing to fervid emotion. His *tol* suffered; he could no longer be a tutor to his pupils. Whenever he said anything it was Radha and Krishna and their love and sometimes he would fall flat on the floor in a state of complete trance exclaiming "My Krishna." At last when the day came when his *tol* would break up he restrained all his emotions and told his pupils to part with a Krishna *Kirtan*. There was an open performance and even he took part in it - was surcharged with the love for Radha Krishna and forgot everything for the time being. Thus they parted and the period of *Girān* in his life ceased.

From this time onward Nimai lived always absorbed in meditation and abstraction. His mother Sachinī was frightened at the condition of her son chiefly owing to the rumours afloat that he had

become a 'hopeless maniac' In despair she sent for Sreebas, a friend of her husband, and entreated him to see the condition of her son. Nimai was then in a state of the deepest possible devotion, his cheeks wet with tears and his eyes red with constant weeping. Sreebas—a Vaishnava—was simply astounded with the supernatural love for God displayed by Nimai and consoled his mother that her son had attained to the highest Krishna-*prem*. Sreebas became his *bhakta* and invited him to pass his nights at his place in worshipping Krishna with him. To this he agreed and when his friends came to know of his proposal, they all came to attend the meetings.

So there was a regular party and this party went on increasing in number. The companionship of Nimai infused in his attendants an irresistible flow of *bhakti*. They were electrified by his performance. The *kirtan* in the beginning was only a chanting of the name of Shri Krishna in a musical form. By and by musical instruments necessary to accompany the *kirtan* were introduced. When the *kirtan* began, Nimai would often become overwhelmed with love and would get up and dance with uplifted hands and head turned up. Then they would play Krishna-*leela*, Chaitanya himself taking the part of Radha. At such times he would swoon away and remain for hours in a state of trance. His presence infused *bhakti* and softened the heart of the hardest of those who came in contact with him.

A most notable change in his life occurred in the year 1510. He completely renounced the worldly

life and became a Sanyasin and was initiated into the order of Keshava Bharati of Katra under the name of Shri Krishna Chaitanya, his future designation. He started for Brindaban to serve Krishna in solitude but three of his followers, Nitayananda Acharya Ratna and Mukunda followed him and instead of directing the path to Brindaban they brought him to the Ganges. Chaitanya was oblivious of his surroundings and apparently unaware that it was the Ganges, took his bath in it mistaking it for Jamuna and sang its praise. But soon he knew that they had played a trick on him. Here he stayed in the house of Acharya Goswami. Endless concourse of people came to have his *darshan*. His mother Sachi along with other people of Nadiya came to see him and was much distracted with grief at seeing her beloved son a Sanyasin but she consoled herself by saying "I count not my own joy or sorrow. What makes him happy is happiness to me." With Goswami Nitayananda, Pandit Jagadananda, Pandit Damodar and Mukunda Datta, he set off for Puri heedless of the cry and lamentation that arose in the house of the Acharya at his departure. He entered the temple of Jagannath in an ecstatic mood and was beside himself with love at the sight of the God and was conveyed by Sarbabhauma to his house in a state of trance. Here ensued a lively discussion about his divinity. Sarbabhauma was a reputed scholar and a master of theology. He belonged to a higher monastic rank than Chaitanya and began a long discourse with him on Vedanta with the avowed

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conviction of his being a superior and experienced scholar, but his logical expositions were all refuted by Chaitanya who established his own Sarbabhauma was filled with wonder at his diverse expositions and with the self-abasing belief that he was Krishna himself and exclaimed, "He is Krishna incarnate, but I in my ignorance have grievously sinned by showing pride to him" Sarbabhauma became his disciple From this place he started alone and wandered about the country for six years preaching his new faith On one occasion he went to Benares where he is said to have held a long disputation with Prakasananda, a teacher of the monistic Vedanta of Sankaracharya He condemned the commentaries of Sankara on the Vedanta Sutras as being mixed with his personal beliefs. He rejected the doctrine of Sankara that the world is illusion (*Vivartabad*) and supported the doctrine of development (*Pari-namabada*) From this place he went to Mathura, Brindaban and other places and then returned to Puri where he spent the last eighteen years of his life and died in Saka 1455, corresponding to 1532 A D.

Chaitanya was a great teacher who conceived thus "Krishna is the Highest God, the Perfect Being himself, the source of all incarnations, the chief of all causes He is the source of the eternal Heaven, the external incarnation, the eternal Universe His body is composed of *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda* Radha is the personation of that supreme emotion (*mahabhava*) which is the quintessence of *prema* — They can not be gained without

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adoration.—The play of Radha with Krishna is extremely deep and cannot be learnt from the *dasya*, *bhatsalaya* or other moods. The *Sakhis* alone are qualified for it; from them has this play spread—A *Sakhi* does not long to play with Krishna all by herself; but she feels a keener delight in contriving Krishna's dalliance with Radha—The *Sakhis* do not wish for Krishna's embrace, but they exert themselves to make Krishna embrace Radha. The love of the Gopis is unselfish.

Krishna's votaries are of three kinds: desireless, salvation-seeking and all-coveting. If a man is wise he will adore Krishna even for the realisation of his earthly desires. Unless a man has *bhakti* no pursuit can bring fruit to him; *bhakti* alone has power to achieve all results. If a man adores Krishna for the realisation of his desire, he soon gives up his material desires and cherishes pure *bhakti*. God is gracious; knowing His passion-led *bhakti* to be ignorant, God grants him His feet and thus destroys his desire (of earthly joys). The society of the pious, the service of Krishna and the emotion of *bhakti*.—these three make us leave all things else and incline to Krishna. 'The emancipated in life,' may follow either *bhakti* or knowledge. The former adores Krishna by (his) merits, while the latter is dragged down into sin by his dry knowledge..... The 'invested with Swarup,' gets a celestial body by the force of his *bhakti* and adores Krishna being attracted by his qualities. Illusion causes the sin of aversion to Krishna, while *bhakti* inclining us

towards Krishna releases us from illusion There is no liberation save through *bhakti* Krishna is to be approached and attained by *bhakti* alone

Chaitanya made proper arrangements for the teaching of his doctrine of Krishna *pram* or love to Krishna Adwaita and Nitayanand were stationed to work in Bengal and Rupa and Sanatana two other pupils, were sent to Mathura Chaitanya, Nitayananda and Adwaitananda are called the three *Prabhus* of the sect The descendents of Nitayanand live at Nadiya and those of Adwaita at Santipur Nitayananda was appointed by Chaitanya as the head of the Church His female descedants live at Balegor and male ones at Khordu near Barrackpur The adoration of Chaitanya has become a sort of family worship throughout Orissa there are temples belonging to his followers at Mathura, Brindaban and three principal ones in Bengal, one at Nadiya dedicated to Chaitanya the other at Ambika to Nitayananda and the third at Agradvipa to Gopinath There is a shrine dedicated to Chaitanya in the vicinity of Dhakadaksina in Northern Sylhet At Khetur in the Rajasahi district a temple has been erected in his honour In Puri there is a temple specially dedicated to him and many little shrines are scattered over the country He is generally adored in connection with Vishnu and is at the present time the apostle of the common people in Orissa



Tulsidas.

CHAPTER X.

श्री सहित दिन-कर-वंस-भुवन काम बहु छवि सोहई ।
नव-अंघ्रि-घर-वर गात अम्बर पीत मुनि मन मोहई ॥
मुकुटांगदादि विचित्र भुवन अंग अंगन्हि प्रति सजे ।
अंभोज नयन बिसाल उर भुज घन्य नर निरखंत जे ॥

Blessed are those persons who have a vision of Shri Sitaji by the side of Shri Ramchandrajī—the scion of the family of the Sun—the two resplendent with the beauty of love: His body of the hue of the new-formed cloud. His eyes like the lotus and His chest broad and His arms long. putting on the crown and the armlet and other ornaments on His person. dressed in yellow robes: so attractive to the mind of the Sages.

The above lines taken from the Ramayan describe the form of the Lord that Tulsidas loved to meditate upon. In another couplet quoted from the Tulsī Satsai, he further developes this theme:—

जगत जननि श्री लालकी जनकराम शुभ रूप ।

The Mother of the universe is Shri Sitaji and the Father the auspicious form of Shri Ram. In this conception of the Lord of the universe, Tulsidas embodied the highest philosophy with the common phenomenon of the world. The highest tribute of being the creator of the universe is of little value to the average being if this does not include the

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maternal caress and mercy and the paternal sense of protection To Tulsidas the Lord was as the father and mother He was even more.—

तू दयालु दीन हौं तू दानी हौं भिखारी ।
 हौं प्रसिद्ध पातकी तू पाप पुंजहारी ॥
 नाथ तू अनाथ को अनाथ कौन मोंसों ।
 मों समान आरत नहीं आरतिहर तों सों ॥
 ब्रह्म तू हो जीव हौं तू ठाकुर हौं चेरो ।
 तात मातु गुरु सखा तू सब बिधि हित मेरो ॥
 मोहिं तोहिं नाते अनेक मानिये जो भावे ।
 ज्यों त्यों तुलसी कृपालु चरण शरण पावे ॥

The Lord was to Tulsidas as his Father, Mother, Master, Spiritual Guide and Friend Tulsidas was a beggar; the Lord a charitable donor, he a notorious sinner, the Lord the condoner of sins; the protector of the unprotected was He and none more unprotected was there than Tulsidas In fact the one was the complement of the other What Tulsidas prayed for was complete surrender of the self to the Lord

Tulsidas belonged to a Brahman family of Rajapur in the district of Banda His father's name according to some was Murari Misra and according to some others Atmaram Dube His mother's name was Hulsī Born in 1589 Sambat, he died in the city of Benares while in his 91st year He was married in his 20th year and had a son who predeceased him It is said by some that being taunted by his wife for loving a mere woman, Tulsidas turned

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his affections towards the Lord. Any way whether the credit goes to him or his wife, there is no doubt that in course of time he became one of the greatest devotees of the Lord the world has ever seen. While yet alive he had begun to be regarded as a saint and was once asked by the Emperor to do some miracles. His reply was that he was a simple beggar and possessed no powers whatsoever. The offended Emperor is said to have imprisoned him. The story goes that thereafter the Emperor discerned certain miraculous powers in the saint which led him to set the latter free. Tulsidas is credited with having written 21 books, the most important of which are the Ramcharitra Manas popularly known as the Ramayan and the Binay Patrika.

It is rather difficult to rightly understand the religious and social philosophy of Tulsidas. He is a worshipper of all gods and goddesses. His Binay Patrika is replete with beautiful prayers addressed to several gods and goddesses. In the Ramayan he has offered prayers to scoundrels even—who without any rhyme or reason do evil to others. But there is one prominent thing about these prayers and that is that the prayer is always for the Lord's love. About the name of the Lord also Tulsidas himself has addressed Him by a number of names, but

यद्यपि प्रभूके नाम अनेका, श्रुति कह अधिक एक ते एका ।

राम सकल नामन ते अधिका, होहु नाय अघखन गणवधिका ॥

in the above lines, he distinctly gives preference to the Ram name of the Lord. Where does the Lord

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reside ? Is he in Heavens sipping the nectar, careless of mankind ? Is He in the milky ocean reclining on the serpent with Lakshmi near Him ? Is He in Brindaban sporting with the maids ? Is He in Ajodhya reposing in the Kanak Bhawan ? Is He in any particular country or place ? Did He thrive or will He appear in any particular age ? Tulsidas has thus set down his conception of the Lord —

हरि व्यापक सर्वत्र समाना, प्रेम ते प्रगट होहीं मैं जाना ॥

देशकाल दिसि बिदिशहु माहीं, कहहु सो कहां जहां प्रभू नाहीं ॥

अगजगमय सब रहित विरागी, पवन ते प्रगट होहि जिमि आगी ॥

The Lord pervades everywhere alike I know that he discloses Himself through love Tell me in what country, in what age and in what direction He is not. Pervading the entire universe, He is yet far above it and is free from attachment He discloses Himself out of air just in the same way as fire does. In spite of all this Tulsidas has a distinct leaning towards Ajodhya as the most sacred place on earth The formless Lord never appealed to him, and for the purpose of devotion and worship he took recourse to the Shri Sita Ram form.

जहां राम तहँ काम नहिं, जहां काम नहिं राम ।

तुलसी कबहीं होत नहिं, रविरजनी इकठाम ॥

Where there is Ram there is no evil desire ;

TULSI ! never can the sun and night be together.

Though Tulsidas was an exponent of the *Varanashram Dharma*, he was quite liberal in matters of food and style of living. Once a

Vaishnava, all social distinctions should cease and a Sudra Vaishnava was as sacred to him as a Brahman Vaishnava. His Lord embraced a poor fisherman and showed him the highest respects. In fact the ideal of the brotherhood of man is nowhere found in a better state than in Vaishnavism. Says Tulsidas:—

तुलसी यह संसार में, सबसे मिलिय घाय ।

न जानौं केहि भेष में, नारायण मिलि जाय ॥

Eagerly embrace everyone in this world; for Tulsī does not know in what form you may meet the Lord. No better incentive to service to mankind can be discovered !

The highest goal of a devotee among the Acharyas and the Ramanandis is not to be one with the Lord but to be near Him and to serve Him. If that goal be not attainable in one life, the Vaishnava is not unreasonable enough to pray for that all at once. He is quite content to leave the laws of the Lord to have their own course and all that he prays for is :—

जेहि योनि जनमो कर्म बस तेहि रामपद अनुरागजं ।

Let me be re-born again and again, but pray grant to me in every life love for the feet of Shri Ram. Quite a reasonable prayer one should think which it is not perhaps, open even to the Lord of the Universe to refuse. In another place in the Ramayan Shiva is represented as praying for two things only and these are—(1) love for the Lord and (2) good society for ever.

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These two themes Tulsidas has developed to some extent in his Ramayan. In regard to society he says —

बहुभल बांस नर्क कर ताता, दुष्ट संग जनि देहि विधाता ।

He would much rather remain in hell than in the company of the vicious. Ninefold paths of attaining love for the Lord are given below — (1) श्रवण (hearing the Lord's praise), (2) कीर्तन (singing the Lord's praise), (3) स्मरण (remembering the Lord), (4) पाद-सेवन (serving the Lord's feet), (5) अर्चन (worshipping), (6) बन्धन (prayer), (7) दास्य (service), (8) सख्य (friendship, considering the Lord to be the best and sincerest friend) and (9) आत्म-निवेदन (self-surrender). But Tulsidas considerably simplified matters by stating that anyone of these was enough to constitute a *bhakta* and in fact the simplest and best is the constant recitation of the name of the Lord.

The verses of Tulsidas are well-known even in distant villages and the Ramayan may be described as the one book which has helped to give a religious tone and improve the morals of the vast bulk of the Hindi-knowing population of India. So long as Hindi continues to be spoken and written, so long as Vaishnavism is recognised as a religion and so long as Hinduism exists, so long will the Ramayan and the Binay Patrika of Tulsidas continue to be the solace of many a distressed soul.

Nabha.—Another great Vaishnava of the time, Nabha, compiled the Bhaktmal, which contains

the lives of about 200 saints. Written in a terse style, with a paucity of details and references not easily understood, the book would have remained a sealed document to the world inspite of the endeavours made by Priyadas. Thanks, however, to the Vaishnavaratna Shri Sita Ram Sharan Bhagwan Prasadjji Rupkala of Ajodhya, the book has been made available to the public by means of an exhaustive and erudite commentary in Hindi. The simplicity, the devotion and the self-sacrifice of a large number of Vaishnava saints are now known to and can be studied by any student of Hindi literature.

Nabha in his search of the Lord went a step further than Tulsidas and not content with His mere attributes or His images, he saw Him in the devotees of the Lord, in his spiritual preceptor and in love itself.

भक्त भक्ति भगवंत गुरु चतुर नाम वपु एक ।

The devotee, love, God and the spiritual guide, are but four names of one body. In this way Nabha laid very great emphasis on the service of God-intoxicated souls. A saintly man, according to him, was God incarnate and so was love. It must be said that Nabha made it possible for every human being however high or low, to realise religion by loving saintly men and through them the Lord.

About the Bhaktmal it is said in the Hastings Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics:— The importance of study of the sacred stories contained

comprehension of the religious
ism cannot be overrated
the *acta sanctorum* of the
house of legends regard-
modern, of the Bhagwat

r Vaishnavas of the time
tioned are Surdas and
n in a village near Delhi
as an ardent worshipper
he author of the (1) Sur-
Sahitya Lahri, (4) Beah lo
which the Sur Sagar is
ition A deep love for
ole of his poetry and it is
d he could give a vivid
Here is a description of
e flute —

३।

नटत मधुर मधुर सुर बाजत ॥

३ नैन सैन अति छाजत ।

३र कोटि मदन छवि लाजत ॥

यह उपमा कछु लागत ।

गीड़न आपु आपु अनुरागत ॥

लाल सखन संग सोहत ।

लखत सुरनर मुनिमन मोहत ॥

ting description of the Lord
scenery of Braja with the
s related as to how Surdas

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was once helped by the Lord Himself in human form When he was on his deathbed one of the attendants reminded him that he had not written anything in praise of his spiritual preceptor The reply was he had never differentiated between his preceptor and the Lord, which was followed by the following verses

भरोसो दृढ़ इन चरन करी ।

श्री बल्लभ नखचन्द्र छटा बिनु सब जगमांझ अँधेरो ॥

साधन और नहीं हो कलि में जासों होन निवेरो ।

सुर कहा कहि दुविध अँधेरो बिना मोलको चेरो ॥

These were the last verses composed by Surdas

Mira Bai.—A singular instance of self-surrender to the Lord is furnished in the person of Mira Bai. The daughter of a great Rajput chief and married to a greater chief, she preferred the toils and privations of the life of an ascetic to the comforts and pleasures of a royal life Early in her life she had realised that the world was transient and had fixed her love upon the undying, unchanging and ever-present Lord of the Universe Married she was in the usual course, but she refused to become the wife of any earthly being. Never did she bow before any god or goddess and once at the earnest entreatie of her mother-in-law to worship Durga, her reply was:—“This head has already bowed to Lord Krishna and will never bow before any other lord or lordling.” Old mother-in-law, could not make Mira do otherwise In the following verses she describes her religion:—

मेरो गिरिधर गोपाल दूसरो न कोई ।
 तात मात बन्धु भ्रात आपनो नाहिं कोई ॥
 जाके सिर मोर मुकुट मेरो पति सोई ।
 अबतो बात फैल गई जानै सब कोई ॥

Lord Krishna alone is mine, none else,
 Father, mother and brother, none of these are ours,
 He is my husband who wears the crown of
 peacock feathers.

This has now become public, every one knows it.

The orthodox Rajput chieftain in whose family Mira Bai was married tried to put every possible obstacle in the way of her renouncing the world; attempts were even made to put her to death. She however survived all these and in the end started for Brindaban after having put on the garbs of a Sanyasin. On reaching there she exclaimed —

इन आखिन में फिरत रहीं की बृन्दावन कुञ्ज ।
 की इनमें मैं फिरति हु धन्य पुण्य के पुञ्ज ॥

It was when she was living in Brindaban that her husband realised how in abandoning such a religiously-inclined wife, he has brought upon himself worldly troubles and miseries. He thereupon approached her with a prayer for forgiveness. The good lady, at the earnest entreaties of her husband went for six months to Chitour, returning again to Brindaban. Some years after a number of Brahmans went to her with request to return to Chitour. Upon her refusing to accede to their request they said that they would starve themselves to death at her

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doors She was in a fix. On the one side was her determination not to go to Chitour; on the other was the equally strong determination of the Brahmins to take her there. Placed in this predicament she told them that she was going to her Lord to take permission. It is said that she died there and that her soul is still present in the physical form of the Lord she worshipped. The following translation of Mira's verses by Edwin Russel deserve to be quoted:—

If to be immersed in water gives salvation
Then the fish must get it;
If vegetable diet gains,
The monkeys and birds have it,
If eating grass,
The deer and goats are on the way,
MIRA says nothing
But the love of God can attain it.



Ramdas.

CHAPTER XI.

कष्टें विण फल नाहीं कष्टें विण राज्य नाहीं ।

आधीं कष्टाचें दुख सोसिती ने पुढें सुखाचें भोगिती ॥

No troubles, no fruits, no sovereignty without troubles, he who suffers troubles in the being enjoys happiness afterwards

It was reserved for the Maharashtra to witness the greatest religious renaissance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and to put up the strongest embankment against the surging tide of Islamic conversion. At a time when the wise state policy of Akbar had been abandoned, when little minds held the reins of the Moghal Empire, when those in authority cared less for Empire and more for the spread of Islam, when the highest reward of an administrator appeared not to be the contentment of the ruled, but a few conversions to Islam whether by persuasion or coercion, India produced a number of religious reformers who strengthened the rather tottering foundation of the old religion and imparted to it a new life. In the Maharashtra in particular Eknath, Ramdas, Tukaram, Jairam, Ranganath, Keshava and Anandmurti helped to revive the Hindu religion and created a zeal for the religious tenets that successfully withstood the Muhammadan

onslaught The two most important of these were Ramdas and Tukaram

Ramdas was born on the Ramnavami day in 1608 A D at Jaun, a small village on the banks of the Godaveri His father Surya Punt and his mother Runabai were pious Brahman Vaishnavas of the Shri Ram school It is said that even as a child Narayan, popularly known as Ramdas, attracted the attention of the greatest Maharashtra Vaishnava of the time, Eknath, who predicted a glorious future for the boy Having acquired all the learning that he could get in the neighbourhood he turned himself towards religious meditation For long would he remain rapt in meditation in the village temple, and at one time it is said he had a vision of Shri Hanumanji who charged him with the noble mission of reviving religion and righteousness in the land and of punishing the evil-doers It was at this time that he was initiated into the sacred *mantra* of Shri Ram

As his indifference to the world grew, his parents began to get alarmed They hurriedly settled his marriage and took him to the house of the bride in spite of his protests In the *mandap* sat Ramdas with the bride and her father The ceremonials began and all went on merrily till the priest commenced reciting the sacred *mantra* of marriage The word *savadhan* (attention) immediately turned his attention away from the world and before the *mantra* was over, he stood up and ran away from the *mandap* He was now awake to his spiritual

responsibilities and all attempts to bring him back to his family failed

Away from his home he began living in a small hut at some distance from a village called Takli on the banks of the Godaverī. Standing in the river from early dawn to noon, visiting in the afternoon seven different houses every day with the cry of जय जय श्रीगुपीर समर्थ (victory to the all-powerful Shri Ram¹) and living on such food as were given to him by the inmates of these, and spending his evening and night in the chanting of prayers and in meditation • thus did Ramdas pass twelve years of his life

The next twelve years of his life he spent as a pilgrim. He traversed the whole of India maintaining himself by begging and studying the condition of life in the different parts of the country. He visited all the important religious centres of Hinduism and mixed freely with all those he came in contact with. An ardent Vaishnava Ramdas had respect for all religious beliefs. At Srinagar in Kashmir he met several Sikh saints, some of whom were so impressed with him as to request him to initiate them into Vaishnavism. To this Ramdas replied in his characteristic manner — “Renounce not your faith, for one-religion is as good as another. Guru Nanak was a great man as he had made even Muhammadans utter the holy name of Ram.” Verily he was one of those who निज प्रभुमय देखहि जगत, का सन करहि विरोध । All true religions were to him alike. He had no ill will against any individual simply because the latter

belonged to another religion. On returning from his extensive pilgrimage he appeared before the image of Shri Ram at Panchbati, and prostrating himself dedicated the fruits of his pilgrimage to the Lord.

A story is told as to how he went once to his mothers' house and shouted his usual cry of जय जय श्रीरघुवीर समर्थ. His mother directed her eldest daughter-in-law to give some alms to the beggar. "This beggar will not let you off so easily, mother," exclaimed Ramdas. "Is it Narayan who is speaking," was the question. Ramdas prostrated himself before his mother and replied in the affirmative. The old lady who had become blind with weeping felt the body of Narayan and said:— "You have become prematurely old, Narayan. I wish I could know how you look in your changed attire." Ramdas, it is said, touched the eyes of his mother and they opened wide. The delight that she experienced at the restoration of her sight was only equalled by her happiness in beholding her son standing before her. "Where have you got this demoniac knowledge from?" enquired the mother of her son. "It was an act of the grace of the Lord—He who had come down from the heavens to reside in Ayodhya, the son of Shri Kausalya. He whose touch alone turned a stone into a beautiful lady, the Lord of all lords, the fountain of love and joy, the giver of all bounties."

In the Bhabhishya Puran we read —

कृतेतु मारुताव्याश्च, त्रेतायां पवनात्मजः ।

द्वापरे भीमसंज्ञश्च, रामदासः कलौयुगे ॥

RAMDAS

The English translation is given below .—"The manifestation of Hanuman would be known as Marut in *Satyuga* as the son of *Pawan* in *Treta*, as Bhim in *Duapur* and as Ramdas in *Kaliyuga*" It is the general belief that the reference in these lines is to the well-known Maharashtra saint Ramdas

By the time Ramdas had completed his thirty-sixth year he had become a popular saint known for his purity of life and great supernatural powers. He realised that the mission entrusted to him could not be accomplished single-handed and he therefore trained a band of selfless workers on his own lines and having tested them put each in charge of one centre called *math*. Such *maths* he established over a large portion of India and installed the image of Shri Ram or Shri Hanuman in every temple attached to such *maths*. His *mahanths* were taught to live a life of absolute purity, selflessness and abstinence and to preach polity and religion to the people. Among his disciples there were several women who were entrusted with the work of reviving religion among the womenfolk.

The credit therefore of having successfully withstood the Islamic invasion must be given to Ramdas and to the band of selfless workers that he collected around himself. These itinerant Vaishnava preachers by their life and precepts revived the old religious spirit and thus made the work of conversion more difficult. The Sikhs had demonstrated how they would much rather agree to fatal tortures than to giving up their religion. Ramdas illustrated how

even the old Hindu religion when properly organised was strong enough not to be entered into by any outsider. The history of the rise of the Mahratta power is closely associated with the history of religious revival in Maharashtra. It was due to the religious leaders, chief among whom was Ramdas, that the people of Maharashtra under the wise command of their King Shivaji showed the world what they could do against a foreign aggressor.

Ramdas was a saint. His self sacrifice was admirable. Even as a youth when most of us are not ashamed of our anger and regard it as a cowardice not to retaliate, Ramdas stood with half his body immersed in water. Tortoise would bite him and even eat a portion of his flesh but Ramdas never thought of punishing it. It is related how at one time he was severely beaten by a certain cultivator; but the spirit of forgiveness in him not only secured for the cultivator the pardon of the king but also some *jagir* land. Yet it was this very Ramdas who was the power behind the throne during the time of Shivaji. Ramdas was a true Vaishnava. His spirit of self sacrifice deterred him not in the discharge of his duties. His disciple Shivaji was a king and he always insisted that the king should discharge his duties conscientiously and justly. Once when Ramdas with the beggar's bowl was going round Shivaji observed him and hastily scribbling down something on a piece of paper dropped it into the bowl. "What is it, Shiva?" asked Ramdas. "Surely a handful of grain or a potful of water

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would have been more welcome to me” Saying this Ramdas took out the paper and laughed on reading it “What would you do after I have accepted this gift of your whole kingdom from you,” enquired Ramdas “Sit at your feet,” came the prompt reply from Shivaji “Well then,” said the saint, consider Shri Ram as the king of this kingdom and you rule here as his vice-regent.” Shivaji prostrated himself before his preceptor and thereafter ruled in the spirit dictated to him by Ramdas Shivaji has been credited with being the author of several mean and atrocious acts It would be beyond the scope of this book to enter into any detailed examination of what Shivaji actually was But it would be difficult to admit that he was a Vaishnava, a true disciple of Ramdas and a selfless devotee of high character all these undoubtedly he was—and at the same time to agree to ascribe to him all those vices which we are asked to associate with his name That however is a ground which we had better not tread upon. Ramdas died a year after the death of Shivaji and has left behind his *Dasbodh* which still offers consolation to many a distracted heart

Absolute reliance on God was what Ramdas preached and practised. So long as a man does not know that the body is destructible and the soul is not so long he cannot have the power to withstand troubles or to do the right According to him self-surrender constituted the chief form of devotion to the Lord Ramdas was not in favour of the *shringar* form of worship prevalent among the Vaishnavas.

He advised his followers to insist on good character and on meritorious acts. Duty should be synonymous with religion. A king has his duties to perform so has a saint. The former should protect his kingdom, do good to his subjects and work for the improvement of his empire while the latter should instruct his disciples, help those who seek his assistance and toil for the betterment of the lot of the people of the world. Similarly other occupations in life had other duties to perform, and it was this performance of duty coupled with a strong sense of reliance on God that characterised the teachings of the *Guru* of Shivaji.

Tukaram.—Another great religious reformer of the Maharashtra who had some influence over Shivaji was Tukaram. Born of Sudra parents, he rose by dint of his character and austerity, demeanour and devotion to the religious leadership of his age. Early in life he had conceived a devotion for the Lord which began to make him gradually more and more detached from household affairs. His detachment led to the poverty of his family. His first marriage, his subsequent second marriage, the birth of children, the death of his son, his earnings, the poverty of his family: all these produced little attachment for the world in Tukaram. Work and worship do at times go together; but with Tukaram worship was all predominating. He lived not for himself and his family but for others.

After the death of his first wife he had to incur loans for maintaining his children. In order to pay

off the debts and to meet his family expenses he started a grain shop out of the proceeds that came to his hands by selling the ornaments of his deceased wife. Unfortunately the shop began to run at a loss. He considered it a sin to sell goods at a cost higher than the cost price. Thus the very key note of business was lost sight of. Then his charity which made no distinction between the deserving and the undeserving knew no bounds. In these circumstances the principal was spent up and he fell into heavy debts again.

When his second wife came to know of the loss she grew quite alarmed and one day said to him, "Lord, you have dedicated yourself at the feet of the Lord to which no one can take exception but surely your generosity to the wicked and the hypocrites kills me. No one has the right of becoming generous by having recourse to taking loans—pray, have pity on your little ones, personally it pains me to appear before others because of the large loans you have incurred. However I shall arrange for money once more, but my prayer is that it may not be wasted this time too." Having said thus she begged pardon of him.

The money was arranged for and Tuka Ram left home with the object of carrying on trade. This time he was a little successful, made some profit and started for his home. But this small gain was not destined to be shared by his family. Seeing a poor Brahman being badly treated in his way, by his creditor, he got moved and secured his liberation.

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by paying off his dues and returned home a penniless man

Now Tuka Ram purposely left home for Alaud where he came in contact with a farmer who was in search of a care-taker. Tuka Ram gladly consented to his proposal for he thought it to be a bargain without any capital. Unfortunately; this time again, he was not to have the desired fruit. Sitting as a watch over the crops, he would recite poems in praise of his Lord while birds and beasts preyed upon the crops. The explanation that he gave when taken to task for the loss was that when those animals were hungry how could he scare them away. The village *Punches* decided that should the yield of the harvest be less than the previous year's Tuka Ram would be liable for the deficit. But somehow or other the outturn was found to be more which fact inspite of the farmer's attempt to conceal became widely known and the farmer was compelled to give away all the surplus.

Now Tuka Ram returned home and with his savings he performed the marriage of his three daughters. His domestic life again was far from being cordial.

On the death of his son his indifference to wordly objects increased and he reflected thus within himself :—There is no pleasure in this world. I have tried all possible ways of securing happiness but all in vain. The world like the coal produces more dust when rubbed the more and more one longs for the enjoyments of the world, the more he gets away from

it—Wealth, honour etc are all transient and unreal. Why then should I hanker after them? These thoughts made him more indifferent to the world and he took to the hills to devote his time in the service of the Lord

One night he dreamt that an old Brahman blessed him by patting on his head, but Tuka Ram asked him for *ghee*, whereupon that old man posing as a disciple of Raghava Chaitanya and Keshav Chaitanya gave him the *mantra* of “राम कृष्ण हरि” and disappeared. Now he developed his spiritual powers and the power of reciting poems from memory to such an extent that his fame spread far and wide. While singing the name and praise of the Lord (कीर्तन) verses used to flow spontaneously in the height of his ecstasy and that was a sight for the gods to see. Thousands of people used to witness his charming *kirtan* and return home full of joy. The good people took the opportunity of developing their spiritual faculties by mixing with Tuka Ram while the wicked ones never refrained from doing him mischief. But to Tuka Ram pain and pleasure did not alike matter much

He had produced an exposition of the Vedas, but a famous Pundit of the time Rameshwar Bhatt, told him that he being a Shudra had no right to read the Vedas far less to make commentaries thereon and that by way of expiation the composition should be thrown into the river. Tuka Ram replied that he had done so under instructions from his Lord. The reply did not satisfy the great Pundit

but thinking that a Brahman's commands must be carried out Tuka Ram threw the book into the river. It is said that the book was found to be floating in the river some thirteen days later and this incident earned for him the reputation of being a great saint

Having attracted the attention of Shivaji he was requested to go to him. But Tuka Ram refused the invitation saying that he had taken the vow of poverty and he had therefore no attraction for the palace. True, he required food and cloth, but he could secure the former by begging and the latter by utilising the discarded rags found in the streets. Desire consumed one's life and therefore it was that he wanted to keep aloof from the din and bustle of the world.

Tuka Ram died in 1871 of the Saka era. After his death Shivaji got a temple of the Lord constructed in Tuka Ram's native village. He is the author of several devotional songs which are till now widely sung in many Maharashtra homes. The translation of one of these is given below :—

A beggar at Thy door
 Pleading I stand
 Give me an alms, O God
 Love from Thy loving hand



Modern Vaishnavism.

CHAPTER XII

यं ब्रह्मावरुणोद्रुद्र मरुतः स्तुन्वन्ति दिव्यैः स्तवैः ।
वेदैः सांगपदक्रमोपनिषदैर्गारयन्ति यं सामगाः ॥
ध्यानावस्थिततद्गतेन मनसा पश्यन्ति यं योगिनो !
यस्यान्तं न बिदुः सुरासुरगणाः देवाय तस्मै नमः ॥

Salutations to the Lord whom Brahma, Varun, Indra, Rudra and Marut worship offering divine prayers Whom psalmists invoke through the Vedas and the Upanishads Whom Yogis rapt in meditation perceive in their mind and whom neither the gods nor the demons could fully comprehend

In modern times Vaishnavism can justly claim to have its adherents all over the country The Vaishnava, however, is not much of a propagandist, he is quite content to be counted as a Hindu and is not in earnest to thrust his views on others, believing as he does that all religions lead alike to the same Lord In fact there is nothing in the dress of the Vaishnava to distinguish him from other Hindus The symbolical mark on the head is certainly there, but every Vaishnava does not put it on As regards food he is quite simple, living on grain, vegetables and fruits that nature has given in plenty He would not hurt any living being and would much rather die than put others to any inconvenience for his sake

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His drink is cool water and his pleasure the singing of the good qualities of the Lord. Service to mankind is his motto and he has in his heart love even for his enemy. Some Vaishnavas in Bengal do certainly take fish, but that is rather an exception and is done under the belief that the propagation of species would otherwise be impossible in those particular districts.

Vaishnavism is different in the different provinces. In Madras presidency the vast majority are the followers of Ramanuja. They are known as *Acharyas* and are strict in insisting on the observance of the Shastric injunctions. Great emphasis is laid on external purity and considerable importance is attached to the performance of rituals. Food is prepared in a secluded place and is not allowed to be polluted even by the shadow of a Shudra. Caste distinctions are rigidly enforced and women are not admitted into the religious order. The *Acharyas* have their headquarters at Srirangam in the presidency of Madras. But there are a number of *Acharyas* living in northern India and in fact there is a well known preacher of this order residing in Ajodhya. The language of prayer is generally Sanskrit and greater attention is paid to meditation than to prayer. The devotee is directed to keep his attention constantly fixed on the Lord. Purification must precede initiation. The form of the Lord they adore is Shri Lakshmi Narayan.

The principal seat of the followers of Nimbarka is at Brindaban in the United Provinces. They too

say their prayers in Sanskrit and rigidly observe caste distinctions. They, however, attach greater importance to prayer than to meditation. Krishna playing on flute standing by the side of Radha and with cow, the Braja boys and girls by their side is the picture of the Lord that appeals to them. Madhava's Vishnu has not caught the popular mind very much: but his philosophy and teachings are still read with interest by theologians.

In Bihar and Oudh the Ramanandis very largely predominate. Caste restrictions are freely infringed, rituals are not regarded as necessary and a study of Shastras is not considered essential for a devotee. Ramanand's teachings have penetrated into the lowest strata of society in Oudh and Bihar. Songs and prayers, recitation of *Kathas* and even the chanting of the name of the Lord are more efficacious for a devotee than mere meditation. It is not necessary to know Sanskrit, nor is it essential to worship the Lord in any particular way. All that is required is to chant the name of the Lord and to sing of His qualities in any language and in any manner. As Kabir has rightly put it

पोथी पढ़ पढ़ जग मुआ पण्डित हुआ न कोय ।

ढाई अक्षर "प्रेम" का पढ़ा सो पण्डित होय ॥

Not by reading books does one become a wise man, he who has read the two and a half words of *Prem* (love) has become a wise man. In other words stress is laid on the cultivation of love for the Lord and fellow beings. The Ramanandis have no time to

count the leaves of the tree or to study the botany of it; they are quite content with eating the fruits thereof. Another feature with the Ramanandis is the deification of the spiritual preceptor and in at least one temple in Ajodhya today the spiritual guide has been accorded a place higher than the Lord. The Ramanandis are to be found even in Madras, in Orissa, and in the Bombay presidency, while in the Punjab and the Central Provinces and in the other half of the United Provinces their number is considerable. The principal seat of this order is at Ajodhya where any number of saints and temples of this school are to be found today.

Ballabh's followers are to be met with in Bengal and Bombay, while the chief seat of the order is at Benares. The exacting care and the close attention that are required of a devotee of this order make it extremely difficult for the ordinary layman to follow the tenets of the school.

The Vaishnavas of the Gauriya school—the followers of Chaitanya—predominate in Bengal and Orissa. The principal seats of this school are Nuddea and Brindaban. The form of the Lord that they adore is that of Krishna sporting with the maids Radha to them is the perfect type of devotee and it is through her that they hope to reach the Lord. It has been rightly said that a soul is neither male nor female, it can assume any form. To realise God it is essential that the human soul should be made to adopt a female form. In his life of Lord Gouranga, Mr Ghose says:—"The grand idea that underlies

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the Vaishnava philosophy is that there are two principals in existence, namely (1) the positive male or creative being and (2) the negative female or created being. The positive principal attracts and the negative is attracted. Hence, according to the Vaishnavas the highest form of worship is that in which the devotee spiritually transforms himself into a female, united by pure love with the supreme being, the only male being in existence and Radha is the perfect model of such a worshipper." The form of worship is the chanting of the name of the Lord and singing of emotional songs in His praise and dancing. They go barefooted on public roads singing songs and playing music, and do no doubt create a high religious atmosphere around.

To understand fully the modern trend of Vaishnavism, a detailed knowledge of the work now done at different centres of the different schools is essential. The writer has neither time nor money, neither the capacity nor the will to undertake this stupendous task, but he trusts some earnest Vaishnava writer would some day give the necessary information to the world. The writer, further, realises that no book on Vaishnavism can be complete which does not include a reference to the life and teachings of the prominent Vaishnavas of modern times. He knows only a few of them and if no mention is made in these pages to the leaders of any order he hopes to be excused, as this is due to lack of information and not to any want of proper respect for such personages.

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The leader of the *Acharya* cult is Shri Totadari Swami. He came to Digha in the district of Patna some years ago to preside over the session of the All-India Chatus-Sampradaya Vaishnava Sammelan. In fact at the time he was making a tour all over the country. He toured by the road with his own party of elephants, horses, palanquin bearers and *Acharyas*. The idea evidently was to undertake the pilgrimage as saints did in olden times and to gather as much information as possible about the people inhabiting the different parts of the country. The Swami had visited Ajodhya and stayed there for about a fortnight. In spite of certain fundamental differences between him and the Vaishnava leaders of Ajodhya, he was well received there and accorded all the honour due to a saint of his eminence. He carried with him a good impression of his visit to the holy city, the birth-place of Shri Ram.

The writer had the privilege of being introduced to the Swami at Digha. The Swami struck him as a very well read person, well versed in Sanskrit religious literature. He discoursed in simple Sanskrit and expressed himself with precision and without delay. He lived a life of strict purity and appeared to be a stern disciplinarian. He spent his time either in meditation or in the study of religious books. He took one meal a day and bathed thrice. When not talking he was observed to be in meditation.

The Swami's was a dedicated life. Though elected president of the Sammelan, he would not sit on the presidential chair himself and placed on it

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a photo of the Lord—in the Lakshmi Narayan form himself sitting near by, as if acting as the vice-regent of the Lord. That evidently was the highest form of surrender to the Lord, and the Swami's other acts and his discourses also showed that whatever he did, he did for the Lord and on behalf of the Lord. It was no mere chance that had made the Swami renounce the world and don the robe of the *Sadhu*. He had by training and austerities to qualify himself for it. No one who came in contact with him will ever doubt that the Swami was not fully qualified for the great honour that the Vaishnavas did him by electing him to preside at the *Sammelan*. Such an individual would do honour to any religion to which he belongs. In the subsequent chapters some of the other Vaishnava leaders the writer has come across are described.



Some Others.

CHAPTER XIII.

त्यज दुर्जन संसर्गं भज साधु समागमम् ।

कुरु पुण्यमहोरात्रं स्मरन्तित्यमनित्यताम् ॥

Shun the company of the evil, associate with the virtuous Do good acts day and night, ever remembering that life is transient

It was Carlyle who said :—"No sadder proof can be given by a man of his own littleness than disbelief in great man" Yet nothing is more common than such disbelief. To know a great man in the field of religion is extremely difficult There is no University which can decide the relative merits of saints, nor is there any uniform standard by which their greatness may be judged The English writer George Eliot has thus defined a saint in his *Silas Mariner*.—"In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction, a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backwards" That is a right conception of a saint

The first person of this description that the

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writer came across was the renowned Kurra Shah Sahib of Patna City. It was in 1910 that at the earnest entreaties of a friend the writer drove up to Patna City to meet him. The sight of this man sitting in a small room six feet square, filled up three feet high with earthen pots containing the daintiest sweets and the nightsoil of the man side by side and one over another, at once attracted me. Here was a man who had cast to the winds all rules of sanitation and health. One cubit square was all the place his body occupied, never for over thirty years had he left the spot even for a minute. A questioner had only to stand before him and to ask his question mentally and the reply would be given in clear and unambiguous words. I stood at a distance thinking within myself whether it was not better to belong to one religion than to another. Sweetly did he beckon me close to him and tell me: 'Do not renounce the religion of your forefathers. One path is as good as another.' I could not venture to put him any further questions that day.

But I felt attracted towards him. What was there common between him and me.—I, who prided myself on my modern education, I, who measured success in the language of £ s d, I, a student of Bentham and Mill and this poor, illiterate, shrunken, unpolished and dirty *fagin*? Why should I be attracted to him? Several times did I put that question to myself, but could not get a satisfactory reply. Here was a man who had controlled and nearly killed his flesh and there before him I stood,

I, who was the very slave of the flesh and of all that it represents Yet there was the attraction which deepened as days passed by. I became a frequent visitor to his abode. His society gave me peace; his words restored contentment. I had just begun to love him and he to like me when towards the end of 1911 he was suddenly called away from the world

Another such personage I have come across is Baba Gomtidas of Hanumat Nivas, Ajodhya. He has a very large number of disciples all over Bihar as well as in some of the districts of Oudh. He is the spiritual guide of a large number of educated Vaishnavas of this province. I met him for the first time about two decades ago at Ajodhya, which place he has never been known to go out of even for a day. His is indeed a striking personality: tall and stalwart, active with a flowing beard and penetrating eyes. When I saw him first he had clearly overstepped his three score years and ten. He was living only on fruit diet and that too taken once at dead of night. Thrice he bathed and spent his time entirely in prayers and worship. His one desire is how to do good to those who go to him. At his residence Hanumat Nivas any one is welcome to take his meals and it is a sight to see the old man tenderly supervising the service at dinners. He has a remedy for every disease, a charm to dispel every evil spirit and a solace for every distressed heart: and that remedy, that charm and that solace is but the name of the Lord. Go on chanting the name of the Lord as much as you can and all your desires will be fulfilled:

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that is the substance of all his teachings. He takes pleasure in serving others. All his houses are placed freely at the disposal of those who go to him, food is supplied free and even monetary assistance is often rendered. Still his income is considerable and he is never known to have experienced any difficulty in running the large establishment at the Hanumat Nivas.

Another great Vaishnava saint that I had the privilege of meeting was Thakur Harnath Bando-padhyaya, popularly known as *Pagal* Harnath. Born on the 3rd of July 1865 at Sonamukhi, a small town in the Bankura district of Bengal, he read up to the B. A. class and then took service in the Kashmir State. After a short time he resigned and gave himself up entirely to the worship of the Lord. He remained a householder all his life and was never known to have renounced the world. He was a great believer in the efficacy of the Lord's name. Said he:—"There is no unholy object in the world. Should there be any, it becomes the holiest of the holy by contact with the Lords' name. Hence always remain absorbed in his name even when you are sleeping or dreaming.. The power of name is such that it cures one of all his worldly trouble." In another letter he said:—"Calmly go on taking his name, you will see that you will fully attain all joy and peace in no time."

I met him once when he visited Patna. I met him thrice again. There was nothing of a *Sadhu* outwardly in him. An ordinary *dhoti* with a coat

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was all his dress. The greatness in the man, however, was patent to any close observer. He was all humility. Addressing others as father, he was verily innocent as a lamb. I remember when walking to the railway station once by his side, I put a question to him and the reply came forthwith from him :—"It is not a saint that grants your request. The store room is one and the store keeper too is one. Because a certain article is issued out of the store room at the instance of one saint, do not you imagine that it is he who is giving it to you. One saint thus is as good as another, and it is a mistake to run from one saint to another merely to obtain a worldly object." The question asked was whether one should not go to another saint for the attainment of a worldly object if he did not get it through one saint. When I met him for the last time, he did me the honour of coming over to my house and very kindly invited me to Sonamukhi. Unfortunately I could not go there. He was a follower of Chaitanya and the form of the Lord that appealed to him was that of Radha Krishna. In one letter he says :—"Perhaps you are feeling quite out of sort for Krishna is not in your bower today. Drawn by the attractions of a more ardent devotee elsewhere, He has perhaps left you to go over to His new haunt of enjoyment. You cannot help it. He has many devotees and is bound to bestow his attention upon each in turn. He is dearer than life to all created objects, movable and immovable and they all want Him. He will never forget you."

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One Bihar Vaishnava whom I would specially like to mention here is Shri Ramaji. He was born in the month of Chait in 1867 at a village near Siwan in the district of Saran. He began his education in his 12th year and for six years continued to be a good student. He was initiated as a disciple of Baba Bhishamdas, a well-known saint of Bakerganj in Patna. Since that time service to his spiritual guide and service to the Lord began to occupy the greater portion of his time. All efforts to ween him away from his new line of work were of no avail and at last it was decided to take him away from Patna. He closed his school books and entered the office of the Railway Audit department at Gorakhpur. Here he worked very well and soon attracted the attention of his superior officers by his hard and careful work. He was found always at his table dealing with files and during office hours never left his chair for any length of time. His mornings and evenings he devoted entirely to prayer and to the reading of the Tulsidas Ramayan. One day while returning from office his office peon accompanied him and during the course of conversation it transpired that the peon was a Brahman. So he has been taking work from a Brahman! This very idea was revolting to him. He forthwith wrote out and submitted his resignation. His officer sent for him and after learning the reason of his resignation told him that such incidents could not be avoided in service. "Then I shall no longer serve," came the straight reply from him.

Ramaji's life of usefulness began after that. He went about from village to village preaching the gospel of love of God. He established Sankirtan Samajes in quite a number of villages in his subdivision and in other places. He wrought a great reform in the areas in which he worked; people gave up meat and drink by coming in contact with him. In the sphere of social reform too he was a prominent figure. He discouraged taking of *Tilak* in marriages and insisted on simplicity in food and dress.

The form of the Lord that he worshipped was Shri Sita Ram—not the King and Queen, not the child Ram, but the bridegroom Ram and the bride Sita. The marriage time picture of the Lord, clad in yellow, sitting under the yellow *mandap* (pavilion) with Shri Sitaji robed in regal bridal dress sitting by His side, very much appealed to him and threw him in fits of ecstasy. Over and over again he would have the scene enacted. Wherever he went his friends and admirers arranged for it, knowing full well that it was this picture of the Lord that he adored and worshipped. It was at his instance that this *lila* had become a regular feature of the Sankirtan Sammelan held every year at some place or other in Bihar or the United Provinces. I have witnessed some of these performances and can say that Ramaji was so enamoured of the picture that even when ill he would forget his illness and begin to dance and sing whenever he beheld the bridal pair. Once he was down with asthma accompanied by fever

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and had been asked by his medical advisers not to leave his room. One of his admirers had, however, arranged for the performance and on the date fixed his illness grew worse. At his request the performance, however, was not postponed. As it was being performed Shri Ramaji entreated one of his admirers to take him to the *mandap*, undertaking to remain a mere passive spectator. Two of his admirers brought him there. But the very sight of the bridal pair galvanised him into activity. He forgot his asthma, he discarded the advice of his attendants, he threw off the wrapper that was covering him, and up he rose and the next moment he was dancing and singing the praise of Lord. He continued thus for a quarter of an hour and all efforts to make him sit down were of no avail. At last it was decided to rush through the programme. A little later Shri Ramaji was removed to his residence. He died on 30th April 1928.



Ramballabha.

CHAPTER XIV.

शान्तं सर्वगतिं सूक्ष्मं परब्रह्मो सनातनम् ।

राजीव लेखनं रामं प्रणमामि जगत्पतिम् ॥

Salutations to the Lord of the Universe, the all-pervading, eternal, Lord of all lords, Ram of the lotus eyes, the giver of all peace and happiness

Undoubtedly the greatest moral force in the Vaishnava world of northern India at the present time is Shri Pandit Ramballabha Sharan of Janki Ghat, Ajodhya. Great as a scholar, greater as a man of unimpeachable character, unaffected by favour or frown, undisturbed by vilification, unelated by adulation, alike in his treatment towards the rich as well as the poor, he is every inch of him a saint. His vast learning has no touch of pride in it; his unassuming civility knows no distinction of faith; his sweet temper is not hid under the bushel of admiration and his deep humility is intended for all. All these leave an indelible impression on those who meet him and easily mark him out as one of the greatest living saints.

Born on Friday, the 13th day of the dark half of Asarh 1918 of the Sambat era, corresponding to the 5th July 1861, at the village Ranhar in the

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Panna State, Bundelkhand, Dhanudhari Tewari—for that was the original name of the subject of the sketch—was the son of Shri Ramlal Tewari and Shrimati Ramadevi and the grandson of Shri Gadadhar Prasad Tewari. His education began very early. Even as a child he distinguished himself by his fondness for books. He remained an utter stranger to games, outdoor and indoor, throughout his life. Village gossip had no attraction for him. Scandals he never listened to and indecent jokes he did not tolerate. Either with his books or in worship did he spend his childhood. By the time he was nineteen he had received a thorough grounding in Sanskrit and had read most of the religious literature. At the age of twenty he was initiated into the holy order by Shri Rambachan Das and renamed Ramballabha Sharan—a name by which he has been known since. Thereafter he went from place to place performing pilgrimage. Sometime later he settled at Benares with the object of acquiring more knowledge. While here he visited daily the temple of Vishwanath. It is said that one day he had a dream of Shiva who directed him to go to Ajodhya. “But I have not yet completed my education,” replied Ramballabha Sharan. “You have; and you had now better go and teach others from Ajodhya.” A few days later he met a Vaishnava of the name of Harihardas, who escorted him to Ajodhya.

For over forty six years he has been living at Ajodhya, training the *Salhus* and raising the tone

of their morality From day to day he has been preaching them how a *Sadhu* should live, what he should and what he should not avoid. Through him many have learnt reading, many can write and all have now before them a high ideal of life in Ajodhya. A reform to be effective must come from within and no amount of outside influence can effect any reform among the *Sadhus* of Ajodhya. The subject of this sketch does not resort to the cane or to social boycott; his methods are simpler as his remedies are more efficacious. He creates a higher and nobler atmosphere and by daily hammering at the subject succeeds in bringing about a change in the outlook of the person. In this way his reforms are lasting and the reformed beings do not go back to their old habits.

It is a very strenuous life he is leading. His day begins at 3 a. m. with prayers and recitations. Before sunrise he finishes his ablutions and bath and remains absorbed in his worship till 8-30 a. m. *Arati* follows with prayers and distribution of *balbhog*. At 10 he comes out and mixes with his disciples and visitors. Another bath at noon is followed by *arati* and *rajbhog*. Thereafter he devotes about two to three hours to private studies or to giving lessons to *Sadhus*. A third bath at 3 p. m. and then he proceeds to the pavilion erected by Baba Manni Ram to recite his *Katha*, along with which he gives general advice to the *Sadhus* how to improve themselves and make themselves generally useful. He returns after dusk to his house and talks freely to

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his visitors for about two to three hours Prayers and *arti* close the day's work at 10 p m

Ramballabha Sharan is a scholar He is a recognised authority on the Vaishnava religion It is a pleasure to listen to his elucidation of a difficult Sanskrit text or to his commentaries on a standard work He has been connected with several religious newspapers and magazines Once while he was staying with the writer, a renowned Sanskrit scholar wanted to see him The writer introduced the scholar to the saint The meeting of these two great men was indeed a sight The conversation began in Sanskrit and lasted for over half an hour On the one hand was a deeply religious man, on the other was an atheist, here a worshipper through forms and there before him sat a confirmed iconoclast, here again was a man ignorant of the English alphabets and there before him was a Master of Arts: but the conversation was a singularly interesting one without any exhibition of temper from either side The scholar who prided himself upon his ability to scoff evidently departed with a feeling of admiration for the saint It would be idle to expect such a great scholar to become a convert at the very first meeting, but there is no doubt that the admiration was genuine, for in the end the saint was invited to honour—aye, 'honour'—the scholar's residence with his visit

Ramballabha Sharan is admittedly a saint His mission in life is to improve the men who have taken to the holy order. This mission he has been

silently carrying out. Though a *Sadhu* he has been a strict disciplinarian and in his own monastery every individual knows his duty and willing performs it. He is the life-president of the northern India Vaishnava organisation known by the name of the All India Harinamjas Sankirtan Sammelan—founded by his fellow-devotee Rupkala. His organisation was intended to be the common meeting place of all Vaishnavas in northern India. It has held a number of annual sittings, one of them being at Ajodhya, another at Allahabad and the rest in some town or other of Bihar. A few years later the *Bibah utsava* celebrations were added to the Sammelan at the instance of the late Ramaji.

It is not money that he wants of a devotee, it is not position which determines the quantity of his favour, it is a sincere heart that he appreciates. At Patna, for instance, where there are any number of rich disciples or admirers of his, he is known to stay generally with two of the most ordinary persons. Even a nod from him made in certain directions could secure thousands; but he has not allowed any pecuniary consideration to weigh with him, nor has he bestowed any special favours on anyone for mere money.

His is an absolute surrender to the Lord. At the time of initiation the sermon that he preaches lays special stress on self-surrender. "It is a new life that you are entering upon to-day," he would say to the initiated. "The Lord from to-day is all in all to you. Forget your past and try to build up

your future on absolute reliance on the Lord. Whatever you undertake, you do it for Him. Live a pure life, pure in body and mind—so that it may serve as a temple of the Lord. That great Lord is Ram and unto Him wend your way, for He alone can pardon you, He alone can reform you and He alone can draw you towards Himself” His disciples are spread over the whole of northern India. A ruling prince of the Bombay presidency, a professor of Ajmere, a rich merchant of the Central Provinces, a number of educated people in these provinces and Bengal, while a very large number of persons in Bihar and the United Provinces claim him as their spiritual guide.

What absolute reliance on the Lord can achieve is sufficiently illustrated in his own case. When he came to Ajodhya he owned but a few books, a bowl and a pair of cloth pieces. His greatness and still more his goodness could not remain hidden for long from those he came in contact with. The honour shown to him excited envy and very soon he was left off to find a habitation for himself. In but a few years a small house had been built for him. He now owns a number of houses and a fine garden house on the banks of the Sarju river in which stands a temple dedicated to that greatest devotee of the Lord, Shri Hanumanji—the symbol of strength and energy, the embodiment of self-surrender and perfect abnegation and the idol of all true lovers of the Lord. Though owner of such properties, the guide of many a rich and distinguished personage, the

adored of a large number of devotees, he still remains the same simple Ramballabha that he was about four decades ago

To him the Lord is the master and he the servant. Service thus to him is so very dear. He must serve Him and improve the service that others render to him. Service to the Lord implies service to mankind and for this service the most qualified are those who take the vow of serving the Lord. That is why a reformed *Sadhuhood* is necessary for the regeneration of the people. The same view was held by the Maharashtra saint Ramdas, and the same today is the view of Ramballabha. Once the Hindu society has an educated and morally upright band of *Sadhus*, regeneration cannot for long be delayed. Ramballabha addresses himself either to the *Sadhus* or to educated people, for it is these classes which can give the right lead to the masses.

His is one of the most towering personalities in Ajodhya to-day, towering alike by his learning and his devotion, by his character and his demeanour, by his service and his sermons. His life is one long illustration of surrender to the Lord, of service to mankind and of great self-abnegation. May he live long to set the wanderers on the right path, to help those who seek his help and to offer consolation to those who need it: is the heartfelt prayer of one who claims to have the privilege of being one of his men and who has not often looked up to him in vain for his advancement in this world and for progress in spiritual matters.!

Rupkala.

CHAPTER XV.

उद्भवस्थितिसंहारकारिणीं क्लेशहारिणीं ।

सर्वश्रेयस्करीं सीतां नतोऽहं रामबल्लभाम् ॥

Salutations to Sita—the beloved of Ram—the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the Universe, the reliever of all pain and the fountain-head of all happiness

Perhaps the one person who has conformed most to my ideal of a saint in modern times is His Holiness Shri Sita Ram Sharan Bhagwan Prasad popularly known as Rupkala. He is in several respects the most popular and the greatest saint in Ajodhya at present. For the last thirty six years he has been living at Ajodhya a life dedicated to the Lord and devoted to the service of his fellowmen, a life that by its example is a beaconlight to many a wayward farer on this earth, a life that has wrought so great an influence on the rising youngmen of Oudh and Bihar

Rupkala first saw the light of day on Thursday the 9th in the dark half of the month of Sravan 1897, corresponding to the 23rd July 1840, at a village in the district of Saran. His early years were spent in Allahabad and at Chapra. By his tenth year his father—Munshi Tapaswi Ram—had taught him to

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read the Ramayan and the Vinay Patrika of Tulsidas. In his eleventh year he was admitted into a middle vernacular school, from where he passed on to the Chapra school. While he was a student of the Matriculation class he wrote a book in Hindi which attracted the attention of that celebrated orientalist, Dr. Fallon, who was then the Inspector of Schools of Bihar.

Dr. Fallon appointed Rupkala a Sub-Inspector of schools. He was at first posted to Patna and he put on the official harness on the 4th August 1863. In less than a year he rose from Rs 30 to Rs 50 and in the course of another year he was appointed to officiate as Deputy Inspector of schools in-charge of the Shahabad district. He rose from one rank to another till towards the end of the 29th year of his service, he was in the grade of Rs. 300. In whatever post he was, his officers were always satisfied with his work. He imparted to it a zeal and devotion to duty that extorted the admiration of all those he came in contact with. He retired in 1893 and for the last thirty six years has been in receipt of a pension of Rs 146.

His Holiness is the author of a number of books in Hindi. His earliest books were about the care of the body. After his retirement he has published a commentary on Chapter XII of the Bhagwat Gita extending to over 300 pages, life of Pipa, a book on *Bhavana Ashtajam*, a prayer book which has now run into four editions, a pamphlet on *Kul* and a life of Mira Bai. But the greatest work of his is the

commentry on the Bhaktamal of Nabha His Holiness is entitled to the gratitude of the Hindi-reading public for his very lucid commentry, but for which Nabha would have remained a sealed book inspite of the endeavours of his disciple Priyadas.

But how is it that His Holiness has acquired so much influence over any number of educated persons residing in Bihar and Oudh ? There are a number of libraries named after him, several Sankirtan Samajes regard him as their patron saint, a few of his followers have named their houses after him and quite recently a bathing *ghat* with a building has been constructed on the banks of the Sarju river at Ajodhya in commemoration of his name. The celebration of his birthday anniversary has become a common annual feature in several of the towns in Bihar and Oudh and in some homes at least he is worshipped as a deity

What is there particular about him that entitles him to all this honour ? He is not certainly the founder of a new religion, the propagator of a new cult He is a Vaishnava—the follower of a religion that has existed since time immemorial. He claims to be an humble devotee of the Shri Ram school with a distinct leaning towards the Chaitanya form of worship and prayer He does not pretend to cure an ailment by mere touch, he frankly disavows any power of bestowing children on anyone at his sweet biddings, he has never claimed that his blessings confer desired objects on anyone He does not make any such claims

Does his claim to leadership rest on his authorship ? He has written a number of books and some of these have been admitted to be scholarly His *Bhaktamal* has earned the encomiums of great Hindi scholars. But there are better Hindi writers and authors

Does he owe his respect to his masterly dissertations or to his powers as a controversialist ? It is singular that he does not engage himself in any dissertation on the respective merits of different religions. The Lord cannot be the monopoly of any religion or language or country The path to attain him cannot thus be one only, nor can there be an universal language for prayer The simple villager prattling his prayer in rustic Bhojpuri can as easily attain the Lord as the scholarly Pandit reciting his Vedic hymns or the polished gentleman delighting in drawing room manners of giving expression to his views. It would be suicidal to all accepted conceptions of God to treat Him as having a preference for the Hebrew, the Arabic or the Sanskrit language. No more reasonable would it be to believe that He can live in a church and not in a temple or mosque or even in a private habitation But certainly absurd it would be to describe Him as incapable of entering any structural habitation or unfit to understand a prayer addressed to him in any but the Sanskrit language To His Holiness these are self-evident truths and require no elucidation His favorite subject for discussion is the love of the Lord and in no other subject can he be drawn to take any

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interest. Still then do educated people flock to him

Has his life anything to do with his popularity ?
He has been a good householder, obedient to his parents, devoted to his wife and child, respectful to his elderly relations and loving to his younger relations Deligent as a student, conscientious as an officer, faithful to his superior officers, considerate towards his subordinates, ever loyal to Government his life has no doubt been well led But this does not constitute his title to greatness

What then is there particular about him ? The reply is his religion, for he is nothing if not religious That religion is Love and Service As a friend and fellow-devotee, Mr Raghbir Narayan has aptly sung of him --

Love has been his hope and solace ,
Love has been his ruling star ,
Love will place him by his Loved One,
High in heavenly realms afar !

Love God is his motto Love God—is inscribed on all letters that he sends out Love God—is written on placards hung up in his room His greatness is his love , his weakness too is love It is not mere verbal love It is a love that he has realised, that he is living up to His love is real It is the love of an innocent maid for her lord and benefactor It is the love of a Hindu wife for her husband It is a love so sincere that the lover cannot think of living without the beloved

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To His Holiness, Love is God and God is love. All is love. Wherever he turns his face it is all love, as indeed it is all the Lord. He began his religious life by loving. Love for the lesser paled before love for the greater; love for the individual was merged in the love for the society, and thus he went on till love for the fleeting turned into love for the Lord. He never asks those who go to him to begin by renouncing the world, his advice is to begin by loving—love, love the highest and the best. Naturally after sometime the love for the lesser falls off. Look at a Juliet or a Laili. What becomes of her love for her parents, her other relations, her hearth and home? All that love is consumed and burned up by the love for her lover. That is an everyday occurrence.

Who else deserves to be loved so passionately? Love your husband? The moment his body becomes cold, you will be afraid to kiss him, and what once lay in your arms will either be buried or burned. Love you father? Possibly the very moment he dies, you will be looking into the Bank pass book. Love your son? The darling of your lap will immediately after death be reposing under dull cold earth. Love your friend? If treachery or ingratitude does not separate you, death will surely do so someday. Love gold? The thief or the robber runs away with it and you die of a broken heart. Why then waste your love on an object that is perishable? Why love only to be disappointed or sorrowful? Love Him who is eternal. Him who

will never disappoint or betray you. It is He alone who possesses all the three attributes necessary for doing good to others ; these are power, knowledge and goodness. There is none more powerful than the Lord. There is none who knows your requirements more thoroughly than He. There is none more merciful and good than He. That is why His Holiness would have us love the Lord so passionately.

His Lord is Shri Sita Ram—a tri-coloured picture of whom is to be found in this book. He hopes to attain to Shri Ram through the merciful intercession of Shri Sita. His position is thus of a maid of Shri Sita. The one exclamation that he is heard often to make is **सिया जी चेरी हूं आस तेहारो** (Shri Sitaji, I am your maid and my hopes are in you). It is with the heart of a woman that he hopes to attain his Lord—a heart guileless, tender and loving. He is convinced that for loving the Lord sincerely you must be woman in heart even though you be the manliest of mortals. But this conviction does not lead to dogmatism. There are among those who go to him any number of persons whose love is that of the son towards the father, a brother towards his brother and so forth. His Holiness has never insisted upon any particular relationship with the Lord. All that he impresses upon his visitors is to love the Lord in the sense that we love another human being or ourselves.

Serve mankind—is another of the important principles of his religious philosophy. Serve God, serve your brethren and serve yourself. The greatest

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service to the self consists in the development of the power of resistance and of bearing hardships Cherish those hearts that hate you. Service to mankind should not be discriminative. Every being whether belonging to this religion or that, whether living in one country or another should receive our service In a telegram to the Hon'ble Sir Jwala Prasad of the Patna High Court, His Holiness said :—"Let it be ours to do service" That shows not only the consecrated life that he is living but also the very great importance he attaches to service If you cannot love God, begin by loving your fellow beings Service to God is but service to mankind and to the other creations of His

This is the sort of universal religion that he preaches. His universal religion is however, not a matter of external induction, a mere cant for the unsophisticated, but that which he has fully realised in life and showed to those who have cared for it—even as a chemical process is shown to students of science in the halls of laboratory He has never thought of converting any one and has never tried to establish a church or sect or to become the founder of a cult, like some people who have made such attempts with high pontifical air even in the name of universal religion He is what Socrates would have called the midwife of men's thoughts He has the greatest respect for individuality : he takes a man where he finds him and helps him to rise higher by directions suited to his nature and-capacities. Behold him talking to a Muhammadan quoting all

along from Persian poets ! Behold him talking to a youngster, regaling him with instructive stories ! Behold him talking to an English educated man, supporting his views on logical grounds ! Behold him again when he is talking to a Sanskrit scholar ! Then will the greatness of the saint, the universal nature of his teachings be apparent.

Constant remembrance of the Lord is necessary for a devotee. But it is difficult to keep the mind tied on to any one particular subject for any length of time. Yet this is essential if the remembrance is to be constant. His Holiness has written a book entitled Shri Sita Ram Manaspuja which gives in detail the method to achieve this end. If this is followed the mind can be kept engaged in the service of the Lord. In this way will grow a longing for the company of the Lord and a detachment from the worldly objects. For meditation of the Lord it is necessary to have some image of Him, either physical or mental. One cannot for long fix his mind, much less his affections on a mental nothing. It can well be doubted whether there can be any such thing as a mental nothing. It is characteristic of the mind always to have some image, some shape, some form before it. An absolute blank mentally is an impossibility. To love, one should have some mental image. In order that the love should be intense the image should be constant and not ever-changing. It is with a view to make the task less difficult that physical forms are prescribed. It is because the uneducated cannot readily grasp the mental form

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that physical forms of worship have been prescribed. This form in the case of an individual should be constant. It is impossible to picture the Lord as Sita Ram today and Radha Krishna tomorrow and Lakshmi Narayan the third day and still to have love for Him. Not that you should hate any one not believing as you do. A true wife does not hate the son of her Lord, not his brother, not his father, not yet his servants for they serve the same lord in a different manner. Similarly with a devotee. He is so full of love for the Lord that he cannot but love His whole creation.

Rush not too early to the forests. Rush not to the forests at all, if you can help it. A wider field of work extends before you among your fellowmen. Arm yourself well and equip yourself thoroughly for that work, before you venture to take it up. If you are not sufficiently armed your place is in the forests and not in the midst of the temptations of the world. But it is not always in forests that a man learns how well to arm himself. Flying from a place of temptation is not the only means of learning to resist it. Ignorance of a thing does not invariably imply dislike for it. One who has not known a temptation is more likely to succumb to it when it comes to him. It is therefore that for the generality of men a life like the one His Holiness has led is the ideal one in the present age.

His Holiness is living in an atmosphere that he has created, around himself. It is an atmosphere of pure, unselfish love—the love of an innocent maid

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It is a love so sincere that no words can describe it, no canvas can paint it and no music can depict it. That sort of love transcends everything worldly; it sours higher and purifies the surroundings; it ennobles all those who behold it, it is a personified ideal that deserves to be emulated, to be adored, to be worshipped. For, once in his company there is hope even for the sinner, solace even for the distressed and peace of mind even for the distracted. That is why Rupkala is being deified today in those families whose members have discovered the true greatness of this saint of Ajodhya.

THE END.

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